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Indian mutiny

A M A T.

VOL. I.

Lo Captain John Mackenzie,
A M A T. Seaforth Highlanders.
from
his Comrade
Mr. Coulter

A Novel..

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN & HALL, LIMITED, 11, HENRIETTA ST.,
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DEDICATED

TO

His Companions in Arms,

PAST AND PRESENT,

WITH WHOM HAVE BEEN SPENT

THE HAPPIEST TIMES OF HIS LIFE,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

16 Nov 51

A. Taylor

Gen. Rec. No. 21, 1151 G. T. p. 30

A M A T .

“VOUCHSAFE to those that have not read the story,
That I may prompt them : and of such as have,
I humbly pray them to admit the excuse
Of time, of numbers, and due course of things,
Which cannot in their huge and proper life
Be here presented.”

Chorus, King Henry V.

PROLOGUE.

"Those that come to see only a show, and so agree the play may pass." — *King Henry VIII.*

THE civilized world was aghast.

England was presenting the happily rare spectacle of a peace-loving, though essentially warrior, people suddenly plunged into the throes of what was at once a mutiny, a revolt, and a war of Race and Religion.

Still occupied in counting the cost and staunching the gaping wounds of the Crimean struggle, she did not at first recognize the gravity of the crisis. But as it intensified, she flung herself with all her latent martial vigour into the breach, up which nations as individuals are now and then obliged to rush, if they would follow the path of honour and of duty.

Who can tell what the result might have been had such a cyclone of fiendish cruelty and slaughter swept over us in the somewhat nerveless state into which we had drifted after the long Peace and the hachis feast of 1851?

Gradually aroused, and braced by such soul-stirring passages as 'Alma,' 'Balaklava,' 'Inkerman,' which were barely added to our glorious battle-roll, England found once more that if her position and destiny be proud beyond question, they impose obligations which she must fulfil in the spirit and to the letter, or sink, as her enemies would wish, by a narrow-minded, self-abasing policy, into another Holland.

CHAPTER I..

“ What’s your name, Sir? Of what condition are you, and of what place, I pray? ”—*Falstaff*.

THE “limited mail” is gliding into the crowded and bustling railway-station at Perth. It is nine o’clock on a brilliant morning at the beginning of August, and the occupants of a saloon-carriage are preparing to employ the half-hour at their disposal in the discussion of the excellent breakfast which greets the jaded Southron, who fancies he already begins to feel returning vigour, in a sharpened appetite, produced perhaps by an abnormally early dinner the evening before, and the crisp fresh air of the hills, through which he has passed since crossing the border.

Let us join the party as they get ready to step on to the platform.

“Well! I am glad that’s over, Eila. The rest of our journey is through scenery which even you, I think, will admit has few equals. How I envy you the first impressions!” says a tall, strikingly handsome girl, who, as the *débutante* of the season before, had first taught men, and even women, to add to their natural stature by the adventitious aid of a park-chair, to catch a passing glimpse of one so fair.

“I have already found it charming, Clarice. Ever since we left Carlisle I have been drinking in the air and beauty of the country, which you know is quite a *terra incognita* to me,” enthusiastically assents Eila Trevor, in some respects the antithesis of “the Beauchamp,” her nearest and dearest neighbour in Clayshire. Equally tall and graceful in figure, she adds to the beauty of the brunette all the sparkling vivacity and *savoir faire* which a motherless girl living much in foreign capitals seldom fails to acquire. Here and there the Love-god may have brushed her

with a wing, but, so far as known, no dart of his has yet touched her heart, which is true, open, and pure as the most fastidious Englishman can desire in his wife.

“Come, dears! We must be quick. There is not too much time, and, with such a crowd as there seems to be this morning, breakfast here cannot be done *au grand galop*. Besides, the Highland Railway waits not for an unknown Sassenach,” says Mrs. Beauchamp, in her not very remote day a beauty of the rarest order, as she leads the way with Colonel Trevor, the picture of a cavalry officer, while her husband, who owes his early rank of General to the exceptional advantages of the Guards, lingers behind to give some directions for the transfer of their personal impedimenta.

Full as the room is of divers sorts and nationalities, the entrance of our party is followed by that electric feeling which the sudden appearance of distinguished-looking people often creates.

As they move down the side to the table

which has been reserved for them, one hears :
“ Mon Dieu ! mais qu’elles sont belles.”

“ I say ! I guess that’s quality, that ’ere ! ”
“ Devilish good style !—know them surely ? ”.

“ Ach ! Himmel ! ” from another, who however feels that further admiration is not permissible when such viands are before him.

The running fire at length reaches a table where are four young fellows, whose fresh handsome faces, quiet gentlemanly air, and manly bearing, stamp them as soldiers of the best type.

Hungry, as the healthy ought to be at their age, they have hitherto been too busy in following Dugald Dalgetty’s famous advice to pay much attention to what is passing around them. But the guttural German’s ejaculation makes them look up, and in an instant they spring to their feet with all the gladness of voice and look which an unexpected meeting with pleasant friends calls forth even from those generally undemonstrative.

“ Mrs. Beauchamp ! ” “ Charlie ! ” “ I am so very glad to see you, Clarice.” “ How fortunate,

General !” “How are you, Colonel ?” “Quite refreshing this, Miss Trevor !”—may be heard by the envious lookers-on, who are more or less compelled by the cross fire of animated questions and answers to interrupt again their hurried meal.

Settling down to their adjacent tables, the interchange of information goes on, and the curious, who are never above reading the direction on one's gun-case, or listening to what in a thousand cases can have no possible interest for them, learn that Charlie Grant, Ian Macdonald, Fergus Cameron, and Ronald Elliot, four Captains in the Red Highlanders, are also on their way to Charlie's home on the west coast.

“Of course you are going to Amat ?” is Mrs. Beauchamp's first question, beaming across to him, whom she has known since the days of long clothes.

“Yes, happily !” replies Charlie, with a rapid glance at her daughter. “The Colonel let us four have a month's leave, and we rushed up last night by the Great Northern. You know the

‘Cygnet’ meets us at Inverness, and we take the Campbells on from Fort William.”

“That’s capital! We’ll join forces now then. There’s plenty of room for all in the private carriage your father has sent down for us,” says the General, as they rise in obedience to the inexorable bell, and the Doric accents of the porter’s summons.

While they file out of the room, the heightened colour and flashing eyes of the younger ladies, in striking contrast to the languid *insouciance* of their entrance, betray to an observant Frenchman, himself a passed master in the art of pleasing *le beau sexe*, what is yet hidden from those most concerned.

CHAPTER II.

“What would'st thou write of me, if thou should'st praise me?”—*Desdemona*.

As the train bowls along near the old coach-road at a pace which in no way interferes with its associations, every turn reveals yet greater beauties, recalls more stirring memories, from the first glimpses of the Tay, looking across to Scone, and the view to the right at Murthly, where Lowland and Highland scenery, each perfect of its kind, first meet and struggle for supremacy in the mind of the appreciative traveller.

But a 'little further, and the ancient cathedral of Dunkeld is beneath, nestling its grey ruins at the foot of the pine-clad hills, which seem to

form an impenetrable barrier to the north. The broad, swiftly-running river, the varied greens of birch-trees, whin-bushes, golden broom, firs, ferns, and waving grasses, the Franco-Scottish architecture of the château-like houses filling the basin on each well-chosen site, all combine to form a picture which may not easily be forgotten.

Near here it was that, answering to the far-seeing policy of a great statesman, and to the call of their own martial instincts, the Red Highlanders first mustered some hundred years ago.

Winding through the Pass of Killiecrankie, with its thundering torrent and precipitous sides, the General marvels afresh how the gallant Dundee could have forced his way against such foes, to find only the grim enemy of all waiting for him, in the shape of a silver bullet from the firelock of a superstitious but keen-eyed Celt.

Beyond, as if repenting of her fierceness and bewailing the tragically obscure end of so noble a soldier, Nature softens, and the smiling

Strath, with its rich promise of harvest and plenty on either side of the still majestic river, is filled with a picturesque people, seeking by their industry to wring from an unwilling soil their daily bread. Cattle of that small breed of rich red, cream, dun, and black colours, which add so much to the foreground of Highland pictures, and, last though not least, perhaps the men of Athole, in their striking kilted uniform, on their way to their Chief's gathering at Blair.

Leaving to the right the Castle, speaking in its lofty grimness of the hard blows and bitter feuds of the fighting past, one feels, as the Bruar is crossed, and the bleak hills which separate the shires of Perth and Inverness rise up in gaunt forbidding masses, that the invader had need of all his hardihood to penetrate yet further north.

For some twenty miles on nothing may be seen but tumbling waters, brown heath, and barren hills, scathed and riven by wintry blasts and raging torrents, until, with a graceful inclination, as of introduction, the skilful engineer brings you to Strath Spey.

Sweeping along its further bank you gaze across the famous river to the lofty Cairn Gorm range, and you do not wonder that the men and women have ever been famous for their fighting and their dancing powers. The dwellers in such a district must needs be of classic mould.

Suddenly the eye is struck by a distant, familiar, yet unexpected sheen. 'Tis the fair blue sea, flecked it may be with white crests, and brown-sailed herring-boats — each, like pretty women of varied types, setting off the beauty of the others—and gilded at the southern edges by the stretching yellow sands of Nairn; while far away to the north, range beyond range, lie the hills of Ross and Sutherland, tinted by their purple heaths, the green and yellow grasses, the atmospheric lights and shades, till it seems as if sweet nature, in her most artistic mood, had let her brush run wild in perfect harmony of colour and of form.

Turning to the setting sun, the glistening spires of Inverness appear to rise from the hill-girthed waters as if fair Venice had bethought

herself of fresh beauties wherewith to deck her charms, and had hastened hither.

There may be worse places for a *tête-à-tête* than a railway-carriage, even though that be a saloon, and those in it reach the mystic number. Presently, overcome by the languor which keen air and rapid travelling so often produce, Mrs. Beauchamp is wrapped in the sleep that follows a night of doubtful rest, while the General and Colonel Trevor are joined by Ian and Fergus, who look upon the morning pipe as a thing not lightly to be neglected. Thus, while the train proceeds as if unwilling to hasten through such scenery, opportunity paves the way, and Eila learns from Ronald, of whom she has some very pleasing memories, how it is that he also is *en route* for Amat.

And Clarice ? As she gazes, listens, and finds the well-known, long-loved panorama has not lost its charms, while the honey-laden moments fly, as they are apt to do when beauty hears the voice which stirs yet soothes.

The good tobacco, the freshening air, the

shifting view, were never more enjoyable. And as they lounge in the balcony of the carriage, which Lord Amat, sailorlike, has made a model of compact comfort, the General and his companions indulge the tendency to gossip which the narcotic often breeds.

“It was a rare bit of luck, General, our getting leave in time to meet you here, and the yacht at Inverness; but it was a near thing. Just as we were starting the news of the outbreak at Meerut came in, and the Chief was rather doubtful about letting us go, for, if it spreads, as they seem to fear, I suppose there will be a lot of us sent out in a hurry.”

“It’s very possible, Macdonald. By the telegrams in the ‘*Courant*’ this morning, things look serious, and there are several regiments under orders already.”

“Well, we must make the most of our time,” answers Ian, cheerily. “I long to have a spell at Amat again;—I don’t know any better place all round.”

“You may well say that,” Colonel Trevor

remarks. "He himself is one in a thousand, and Lady Amat is charming, while the whole surroundings are as one might expect from such a host and hostess."

"Yes," enthusiastically says Fergus, whose ancestral acres are only separated from theirs by Loch Eil. "There are few so handsome or so pleasant as she is. No wonder Byron devoted himself to the Greeks if there were many of her type."

"Amat was quite as romantic in his way, but it is not every one who would get so satisfactorily out of such a difficulty as he found himself in, out there."

"How was it, General? I have often longed to know, but hardly liked to ask."

"Ah! It's an old story now, though at the time it made rather a stir in the North, when you were of the smallest. While the old lord was alive, Amat was kept pretty tight, I fancy; anyhow he wasn't much at home, and, like most sailors, was rather inflammable.

"Landing one day from the 'Diamond,' of

which he was then in command, with only his henchman, Hamish Grant, as an escort, he was carried off after a sharp resistance by some Greek brigands who had been watching him while he shot.

“They hustled him away quickly, and set a price of a hundred thousand drachmas on his head. While that pretty stiff figure was being arranged, he managed to fall so desperately in love with the old chief’s daughter, who tended his wounds, that he found himself doubly a captive, and at last cut the knot by winning her hand instead of losing his head.

“Nothing loth, Alekos, who after all had been a true patriot in Byron’s day, and looked upon levying contributions from wealthy Giaours as commendable rather than reprehensible (he was only, perhaps, a hundred years behind the times and habits of these Highland gentry), gave him his blessing. He evidently had very good information! In the mean time Amat’s father died, thinking his son was killed, and Athens was delighted by the sight of the handsome English

lord's wedding with the lovely Zoe. He left the service, and was not heard of for a couple of years, until they appeared at Court, and took London by storm—which was not wonderful, for her beauty was marvellous, and her manner pronounced charming, as we all know it to be.”

“A romance indeed,” says Ian.

“Yes, and so catching that the next autumn Mountgerald and Hendon actually went out to Constantinople, bought two of the prettiest Greeks they could find—married, and took them to Paris to finish their education—but, somehow, it was rather a failure. The most careful copy rarely possesses the attractive qualities of the original.”

CHAPTER III.

“Our castle’s strength will laugh a siege to scorn.”—*Macbeth*.

ONE of the few old houses in the Highlands deserving its title of castle, Amat shows little the ravages of time, while it escaped those of “the ’45.”

Standing on a shoulder of one of the great outlying buttresses, with which earth seems to bid defiance to her constantly warring foe, the ocean, it seems the very embodiment of a chief’s stronghold, built when men had to trust to their own hand to keep what they loved and valued, or yield them to those who were mightier.

No one can approach it, even in these days of luxurious travelling, without thinking of what it must have been to get there in the old times,

when the Black Mount was tenanted, not by millionnaires, but, by those whose claymores drew the cheques, rarely dishonoured ; when Glencoe had no better means of communication with the South than such rude tracks as the cattle-hoof or the skin-clad foot of the clansmen might have worn on the hill, or the half-dried bed of the Dochart could afford.

From the plateau on which the castle stands the wondrous beauty of the scene, like that of Lucerne from the Schweitzerhof, fills the eye, and then the heart of the true lover of nature ; until the overflow of surcharged feeling dims the sight, and poor humanity, drawn heavenward, has some faint glimpse, it may be, of the exquisite which lies beyond in Eternity.

Fitting Châtelaine, Lady Amat is too much a woman of the world to let four young men—(even though one be her only son ; and is it not written how mothers jealously, though fruitlessly, try to guard their male offspring against the wiles they know so well ?) —devote themselves to the delights of salmon-fishing, deer-stalking, grouse-

shooting, and yachting in the Western Highlands without providing such other pleasantly humanizing accessories as they had longed for, vainly, in the East.

Thus, then, come also the Campbells—Lady Alice and her two daughters, Olive and Julia—each with a good deal of experience, and beauty of the world and the devil, of which they well know how to make the most.

Their comparative poverty is the result of an imprudent marriage with “handsome Colin,” the scapegrace son of a cadet of the Ducal house, who, persuading his cousin that love would provide the difference between the moderate income of his entailed Argyleshire property and the expenditure of an extravagant couple floating transcendently down the centre of the stream of London life, succumbed quickly to the humiliating consequences of his selfishness, and left her to continue the battle of life alone.

A long minority and a commission in the Fusiliers enabled the only son, Archie, to enter life with prospects which his Eton schoolmates

declared would not be jeopardized by a too great care for others.

It had long been a dream of Lady Alice's to mate the handsome, dark-eyed, Julia with her cousin Charlie ; and, ignorant of any serious obstacle, she has gladly seized the opportunity now afforded to further her plans.

Julia herself is nothing loth, though a romantic *tendresse* for a certain blue-eyed Austrian *attaché*, whom she had enslaved the winter before in a dullish country house, did threaten a difficulty which gave way on a comparison of ways and means.

Olive, too, is of the darkly handsome type, and not ignorant of the necessities of the world she lives for.

The party promises to be charming ; but, like the component parts of a deadly explosive, while as units they may be comparatively harmless, combined what may not be the effect of a spark from the dangerous hand of Eros ?

The younger ones, at least, may ignore the Past. The Present, is it not enough ? For the Future,

is it needful that they should follow the ancients, and remind themselves by any hideous memento that even as they grasp the cup of pleasure its contents are being changed by the Great Alchemist?

It is the morning after the party has assembled—one of those, so glorious in mountainous countries, filling us with such a keen sense of the pleasure of merely living, that one is tempted to wonder how anything could have had the power to worry us into that utter weariness of existence which now and then overwhelms even the most philosophical.

As they come through the hall to the terrace on the western side of the castle, where, in the cool shade, the artistic proclivities of Lady Amat declare themselves by the arrangements of an *al fresco* breakfast, each one exchanges congratulations on having such a perfect day for the expedition in the yacht, which lies like a swan, pluming her feathers as she shakes out her snow-white canvas on the fair blue water far away below their feet. For it is getting on in the day,

and the impatient skipper flings out such signals as he knows will be duly interpreted by those whom his ever-handy glass has quickly detected on the heights above.

“Mother!” at last says Charlie, who has already been on board and sympathizes with the reluctance of Hamish to lose any of the breeze. “How soon do you think you could all be ready? If we are to be back by nightfall we should be off without much loss of time.”

“I know of old, Charlie,” says Lady Amat, with a caressing smile, “that as soon as you see that sign of Hamish’s you are as wild as a young hawk to be off; but, what do you say, Aline? Shall we saunter on, and leave him to bring the others? They will soon overtake us.”

“That will suit my powers of locomotion admirably, for I don’t think I can find my way down those cliffs without a considerable allowance of time, and help, which perhaps we may find at the hands of the Cavaliers of our own day?” replies Lady Alice, turning with an arch glance in her bright eyes to her *ci-devant*

admirer, Lord Amat, who, somewhat weakly perhaps, had never confided to his devoted, but *tant soit peu* jealous, wife, the tender passages of earlier days, which had been so suddenly and unexpectedly nipped in the bud by the handsome Colin's rapid and successful wooing.

With his ever-kindly courteous bow, he replies, as he meets her expressive look,

"I had already promised myself that pleasure, Aline ! The General will take Milady under his charge, and, as Colonel Trevor will remain to keep order and bring up the rear with the young folks, I propose to myself once more to guide you safely down the Raven's Walk, which has so many pleasant memories for some of us !"

"I shall be delighted, Amat, and as Trevor is never happy out of sight of his Eila, if he fancies there may be a difficulty, we can leave him with an easy conscience. I confess I am burning to be on board the old 'Cygnet' once more, and to grasp your faithful Hamish by the hand again."

"Agreed ! Let us be off. Charlie, and you other boys, take care, and give a good account

of your charges when you report yourselves." And with a laughing nod he leads the quartette down the steep and somewhat dangerous descent to the cove at the foot of the cliffs, where the yacht swings at single anchor, with a slowly shortening cable.

Hardly have they disappeared in the birch wood, which clothes the rugged surface nearly to the bottom, when the Beauchamps and Eila Trevor, privileged by their late advent the night before, are seen coming through the hall by the love-quickenened eyes of Charlie, who, hastening to Mrs. Beauchamp (how craftily even the most guileless lover tries to win to his side the mother of the girl he hopes to take from her!), says, "Ah! we almost began to fear that you were too overcome with the fatigues of your long journey to undergo possible buffetings to-day. But Hamish assures me we shall only have 'cats-paws,' and for once I think we may believe him in that respect, as well as the glass, which now most appropriately says 'set fair.' What do you think?"

“About the weather, Charlie? It looks so promising that I venture to prophesy we shall have a charming expedition if we don't try Hamish's patience too far. We are quite ready. So is Eila, and here, you see, 'the Campbells are coming.'”

“No, thanks! We breakfasted ages ago. Coffee, the secret of which could only have been learnt in the East, cold salmon, and such strawberries!—with cream we certainly cannot beat even in Clayshire,—all were provided by your dear mother's thoughtful care in our own old suite of rooms so that we might rest to the uttermost. We saw you come up from the 'Cygnet' some time ago, and, anticipating your impatience, 'clapped on all sail,' as Hamish would say. And here we are, not very late, I hope?”

“Bravi! Signorini,” cries Charlie, saluting his cousins as they step on to the terrace in all their bravery.

“We are left with strict orders to be good and quick; and, if you will, we may at once gratify our inclinations and sense of duty.

Colonel, will you lead the way with Mrs. Beauchamp? Ronald, guard Miss Trevor with your life. Julia, I can assure you Ian has been counting the minutes until you could continue your amusing account of the 'happy day' you spent on board the 'Clansman' with the tourists from Oban. Fergus, you can have no difficulty in allaying any fear my cousin Olive has in passing the Robber's Cave on the way down; and I," he continues, as he turns with a glance full of tenderest meaning to Clarice, "will bring up the rear with the baggage. You know," he adds *sotto voce* to her, "it is the most cherished part of every expedition!"

As they thus pair off, and move across the terrace, the *tout ensemble* is very striking.

Is it truth, or national vanity, that makes one think that in the short drive from Charing Cross to—say—Park Lane, one sees more bright, beautiful, loveable women, more stalwart, clean-looking, reliable men, than in a month's sojourn in any other capital in Europe?

The Russians, thanks to their terrible climate,

which grills them in summer, and in winter necessitates the ever-abominable flue and the exclusion of fresh air, have no complexions. A semi-oriental taste still lingers. Debarred by custom, inclination, and circumstances from the out-door habits which might counteract its evil effects, they indulge in a mode of life which quickly ages and destroys their looks, of which a few beautiful examples in foreign parts may incline the ignorant to imagine that all of the race are similarly gifted.

Those who have been much in Berlin will agree that its inhabitants are not of a more classical type than the surroundings of that very prosaic city. Homely, thrifty, most kindly as they are, one would not hurt by a single word the feelings of a people with whom we have too much in common not to admire; but though (especially the Brandenburger or Pomeranian) gifted much with thews and brains, one would not go to the banks of the Spree for a Helen or an Adonis.

In Vienna we do indeed find many charming

women and gallant chivalrous men ; but—and there is a great but—to an Englishman in search of a wife or a son-in-law there is something wanting that he would not like to miss in either of these relations.

Italy and the Peninsula each suffer from peculiarities, the result of climate and of race ; so that it is with somewhat of relief that we find ourselves in the less impassioned, though amorous, “Capital of the World.” Gay, light-hearted, clever, full of that *chic* and the thousand and one powers which grace and arm the Parisienne for the life she loves so well, the typical Englishman feels, even when he is most her slave, that there is a scenic effect, an unreality, which, though it has its temporarily dazzling charm, carries with it an antidotal philter which prevents him from bringing his amour to the grand test of matrimony. The Gaul himself has many excellent points, but somehow he does not impress us much with the idea of power, physical or mental. Speak we of the mass ; of the exceptions there are many and brilliant examples.

Let us walk down Piccadilly about six o'clock on an afternoon near the Derby week. Shall we not see by the score women and men of whom our friends at Amat are but types?—though, we confess, good ones, very.

As in the majestic evolutions of a fleet the divisions are led by the commanders, who in themselves speak of the heroic past, so do the gallant Colonel and Mrs. Beauchamp irresistibly impress one with the unmistakeable sense of a history, not the less interesting that as yet it is unwritten.

Mrs. Beauchamp—a Maid of Honour soon after our Sovereign Lady, the very best that ever wore a crown, came to the throne—had lived a favourite at Court, until, following the example of her beloved mistress, she yielded to the impassioned entreaties of the young Equerry, and became his wife.

The guardsman's usually rapid promotion gave him an opportunity for a high staff appointment under Lord Hardinge, and the Sikh campaign taught the young wife and mother one of her

earliest and hardest lessons, as she waited for the varying news in Calcutta, with a heart at times too faint for hope, and yet too unversed in bitter woe to believe the tidings which after "Feroshah" had reached the trembling 'City of Palaces.'

With shattered limb and health, the Beauchamps gladly found themselves once more at home, and with thankful hearts were not less able to enjoy all that means to the returned exile that they had risked much from a sense of duty.

Colonel Trevor's great sorrow had been Mrs. Beauchamp's also—for his young wife, whom he had wooed, married, and lost some twenty years before, had been her greatest friend,—and when the too short year of wedded bliss came to such an untimely end, it was to her and her husband that he had instinctively turned for those soft touches of gentle sympathy which first help to close the smarting wound.

And yet with all his long-borne grief—perhaps because of it?—there was ever such a kindly expression on his handsome face, that as his tall, well-knit, soldier-like figure stood here and there

in ambassadorial salons, or wandered through the well-known world, there was many a winsome glance shot at him which would have conveyed much more than sympathy had he been willing.

His daughter Eila takes after his height, and her mother's beauty. Clad in tenderest fawn-colour, from dainty hat to neatest bottine, her raven hair, sparkling eyes, and dazzling teeth need only the rose of Provence, which she accepts from Ronald as they pass through the flower-garden, to complete his conquest.

Poor Elliot, impressionable as devoted to the fair, he is never out of misery. To be so would be no happiness to him ! From his earliest days he has flirted with his young nurse, his dame, his sister's governess, her sweetest friends ; but withal in such a fashion that none was ever heard to say a word against his silvery tongue, his deep blue eyes, or caressing manner, each and all of which had been quite their own for the time being.

The light straw hat and yachting kit do not make his oval face and active figure less at-

tractive to the appreciative Eila, and so they follow on.

Julia, at first half inclined to resent her cousin's arrangement of the party, relents when she sees Macdonald's approving look as she stands clad in picturesque accordance with the scene. And, as he moves across, one quick comprehensive glance convinces her that, although he is for the day a sailor, in his native garb he would, with his well-cut features and sinewy limbs, be not less striking.

Olive, never an advocate for the similarity of dress which some sisters affect regardless of diversity of feature, complexion, or form, ever studiously avoided appearing in anything like Julia's. In this case her Tyrolean hat, grey home-spun, and crimson kirtle, add another feature to the group, while it has its own distinctive charms, as Cameron's eyes are most expressive in admitting.

Never has he seen, he thinks, anything more *svelte*; even though from boyhood, with instinctive devotion to the sex, he had taken every oppor-

tunity to study the various specimens as they flitted by on the well-known beaten track at Corpach.

Tall and straight as an arrow, with the long swinging stride of the man accustomed from his youth up to the heather and the kilt, his broad shoulders, narrow flank, and clean limbs would yield him an income as a model. Add the dark chesnut hair and aquiline features peculiar to the West Coast, and no wonder Olive is well satisfied with the soldier laird of Benquoich as a playmate.

Having given his final orders to be sent to the forest for the next day's stalking, Charlie is able at last to turn to Clarice, whom in exercise of his seignorial rights he has reserved for himself.

Morgan's last effort in light blue serge, fitting like a glove to the willowy figure, is appropriately topped by the 'Cygnet's' emblematic straw, from under which her perfect features, violet eyes, and wavy hair form an oval picture which our friend Charlie longs, yet hardly dares—to hope to make his own.

Does the tell-tale eye betray him? Clarice does not ask it twice, but satisfied with its first love-bearing story she swiftly seeks, as is the manner of her sex and age, to flee from what she has longed to know.

“We must hurry on, Charlie, or we shall find Lord Amat as impatient as Hamish, and already I think mamma and Colonel Trevor may be wondering why we are not with them.”

“So soon! Well, after all the fuss I made to get them under way I suppose we must make haste, but another time——?”

“We should get up earlier, Charlie,” and with a merry laugh, she springs down the steep path, and bids him follow.

CHAPTER IV.

“Though the seas threaten they are merciful.”—*Ferdinand*.

It needs not a very practised eye to recognize the old blue jacket's hand in everything appertaining to the ‘Cygnet.’ Trim and taut—in herself a model fore-and-aft schooner—there is a smartness in the men and the way all is done which charms the ladies as it does the soldiers, both loving discipline and its natural results, yet for very different reasons.

With a little of the affectation to which the old professional is so prone, Hamish has manned the side-ropes, and given a seamanlike and most hearty welcome to each of the party as they sprang on board and saluted.

Hardly has the last of the laggards quitted

the stern-sheets of the dingy when she is hanging to her davits, and the 'Cygnet' is bowling along Loch Eil with every stitch of canvas set.

It is agreed that after the fatigues of their long *trajets* from the south, nothing could be pleasanter than to spend the shimmering day lazily on board, drinking in the beauty of the ever-changing landscape as they speed along without an effort, and thus realizing the very essence of the poetry of motion.

The day, the scene, and the immediate actors are indeed well suited. As may have been gathered, natural beauty is no new thing to any of them, but, as is often the case when the feelings are deeply moved, for a few minutes after they are settled down on board a great silence falls on them, and each may well think of the past and the future more than the present, as that quickening but indefinable sense born of looking on earth's fair views steals over them.

But Hamish's quick words of command as

they thread their way among the herring-boats break the spell, and, falling into groups, their thoughts become less ethereal, and the conversation flows apace.

With a very natural tendency, the seniors find themselves disposed together on the seats, plaids, and skins which have been arranged for them, the younger ones electing to stroll to and fro in pairs, after the manner of their kind, while now and then they join forces, or the elder ones, as they gossip in the shade.

Already Eila is beginning to find that Ronald Elliot's practice has made him very perfect in the somewhat dangerous task of pleasing.

Happily her experience is sufficiently extensive to enable her to hold her own in the seductive game, which ceases to be amusing only when it becomes too serious, unless it's meant! And they toss the ball from one to other in that light and easy mode which only adepts can maintain.

At first the fair Julia is incensed at her cousin's manifest preference for Clarice; but,

never averse to keeping her hand in if the subject were worthy, finding that for the moment he is hopeless, she does not allow the main object of her visit to Amat to interfere with a perfect enjoyment of such mental honey as Ian's handsome eyes and ready tongue are now lavishing upon her.

Possibly, all sweetness as it is to her appetite for admiration, she thinks it may contain a wholesome acid for Charlie, if he would but see it.

Olive, ever practical, met Cameron in town frequently, and is by no means indisposed to make the most of such an opportunity of finding herself yet further on the way towards being the lady of Benquoich.

As for Charlie, he has been on short rations more than once, but never has he hungered or thirsted as he longs for the time when he may test once for all the depth and breadth of Clarice's love. They have known each other from early days, and with growing years some tenderness has sprung naturally into evidence ;

but he knows enough of women to feel that her very frankness in showing it makes what he now craves for yet more doubtful.

But poor Clarice has long found out in the dreary days of anxious war how dear he is to her, though now, when his love-lit eyes and every action tell her that all she wants may indeed be hers, it seems as if she cannot do enough to keep him from the point at which so many aim.

Lady Alice is too good a tactician to allow Charlie's opportunity to remain long unassailed, and soon she skilfully waylays him, on the plea of their having met so little since he returned from the Crimea, and makes him sit beside her.

Tall, dark, and distinguished-looking, with a soft and winning manner, when she chooses to use it, Lady Alice is a perfect embodiment of the steel glove with its traditional lining.

Hard necessity, following grievous disappointment, has taught her many bitter truths in the lonely, loveless struggles which have disfigured

her widowhood. Each of these has only added to the determination with which she has taught herself and her daughters that all is fair in the game which ends in marriage, provided it be a satisfactory one. In their early days she fixed on her old love's son as the *parti* of all others for her Julia, and until now she has seen no good reason to doubt that with judicious treatment her plan will bear good fruit. But, thorough woman of the world, she is much too wary to spread her net before her prey. Besides, she loves the lad for his own sake, as well as his father's, and she relies on the influences which come of contiguity and good looks, while she would be less than mother did she think Julia's charms less potent than those of the more retiring and statuesque Clarice.

As he throws himself on the plaid at her feet, Charlie says,

“ Ah ! it's a long time, Cousin Aline, since we first sailed together on these waters ; but I have never seen them, or the surroundings,” he adds, with a suggestive smile on his handsome face, as

he glances on the varied beauties grouped on either side, "in such perfection as to-day."

"Perhaps! And yet you must have seen much in the last three years that is very different, if not more beautiful."

"Yes; but at their best things foreign only made one think more longingly of the far North. Few things in their way are lovelier than the views about Aloupka, where the Woronzows built their charmingly bizarre mixture of Tartar and Byzantine styles which we so carefully kept unharmed; but when one had exhausted every adjective of admiration, there was still a void as we gazed across the bright blue sea to the Caucasus, and hungered for but one good look of Ben Nevis, instead of Elbruz or the Tchadir Dagh."

"'Nostalgia,' I think the learned call that form of mental disease," says the General, with a wicked twinkle in his eye. "It is strange how all Highlanders, whether they be Scots, Swiss, Circassians, or Ghoorkas, crave in other lands for the barren, rugged hills which saw

their birth, and yet do not seem to have attraction enough to keep them chained to their sides."

"We generally want most what we can't have," remarks Lord Amat. "Necessity drives many men abroad; but some countries are like the women to whom our thoughts fly back throughout our lives—we can never forget that their beauty smiled on our earliest heart-throbs."

Lady Alice glances at him quickly, but his eyes do not respond to hers, as he looks across the hills, and then turns them on his wife.

"Was it not over there," asks Olive, pointing up the Loch, "that the Prince had so many of his adventures, and proved to the uttermost the loyalty of the men, to say nothing of the devotion of the ladies?"

"Ah! for that," replies Charlie, "we must defer to Fergus, whose great-grandfather was 'out' on the right side in 'the '45,' and who can hardly look upon a Campbell or a Grant with much patience, if you touch upon the topic seriously."

"Nonsense, Master! we did what we could,

and would do it again under the same circumstances. You Whig clans thought you were right; perhaps you were, in a sense; but if we had been all together, then the memory of Culloden would not be what it is," and the fiery blood of the Camerons, sweeping through his veins as he speaks, seems to throw around that magnetic influence which comes from strong men of passionate yet concentrated feeling.

Olive, who has hitherto looked upon him as simply a pleasant, rather good-looking, young soldier, is agreeably startled; and, as she lies under her mother's wing, catching the play of fierce emotion in his strongly-marked features, pictures to herself what an influence a few such men might have in the history of a throne and a kingdom.

"No doubt," remarks Trevor. "In that case the day might have been less disastrous, or even the other way, but in the end discipline and organization must have told."

"Possibly, Colonel," answers Macdonald; "though we have some traditions which point

the other way. But we threw our chance to the winds when we turned our backs on London. A few marches more and we might have had the ill-gotten gains of the Lombard Street Jews transferred to the glens up here."

"Hallo!" laughs the General, waking up as Hamish makes it "eight bells;" "do you boys wear the black cockade or a white one? This air of yours, Amat, seems provocative of more than an appetite. Let us be thankful we can indulge it and enjoy this too classic scenery without having to cross claymores with these fierce Jacobites. They are 'kittle cattle' at times, Milady. I once saw a red-haired subaltern from Strath Glas pursue an unhappy Sassenach round the mess-table, and drive his dirk through the door at him as he escaped, because he fancied his dignity had in some measure been touched."

"Heavens! General Beauchamp," exclaimed Lady Amat; "why I thought they did that sort of thing only in my unhappy country."

"My dear Zoe," says her husband, "you must

not take all they say *au pied de la lettre*. This strong air has got into their unaccustomed heads, perhaps. Let us steady them by a little prosaic food; and, since the sun is over the foreyard, shall I lead the way with Aline to that much-maligned but ever-acceptable meal, which we call luncheon, but which our forefathers loved as dinner?"

"Thanks, Lewis. Excellent as was our breakfast, I already feel quite ravenous, and for the moment," as she archly places her hand on his arm, "certainly would not change places even with Flora Macdonald."

As they sit down, Charlie manages so well as to put himself next to Clarice, whose thoughts, tinged by the looks and words which have escaped him since they met at Perth, have been weaving strangely-pleasing patterns in the web which fancy is ever laying before the love-stricken.

"What an age, Clarice, it seems since we were on board the old 'Cygnet' together! All the pleasure of my home-coming last year

was lost since you were not able to be with us."

"Really, Charlie?" she answers archly. "But I was sorry too," she adds, in a lower tone, seeing him look a little hurt; "we could not possibly leave Homburg just then, as mamma was so ill; and afterwards we went to Florence for the winter, so that I have never yet been able to tell you how very anxious we felt all the time you were in the East. Oh! I do trust there will be no more wars." And, as the memory of all that she has suffered in thinking of his dangers comes back on her, she cannot help letting her eyes convey very much of what she feels to the expectant ones drinking in every sign of the emotions which are filling her heart.

"It is like the sweetest of the old times to have you here again. Would that we need never leave it! But you will not? Until——"

"Charlie!" suddenly interrupted Lady Alice, who, from the other end of the table, has not been unwatchful of his manœuvre, or over-pleased with his manner towards the fair Clarice;

“would you mind bringing me down a plaid? I feel the draught rather on these rheumatic shoulders, and I have a dread of doctors up here, or at least of those whose chief prescription seems to be whiskey by the bottle, like that old man in Islay.”

“And yet there may be worse physic, Aline,” says Lord Amat, with a smile, which in an instant after seems frozen on his face, as the cry he has so often heard comes ringing on their horror-stricken ears—“Man overboard!”—followed immediately by the quick, hoarse commands to bring the yacht up into the wind, let go the ever-ready life-buoy, and lower away the gig, always kept prepared.

Springing to their feet, every one is on the point of rushing on deck. But though he feels, with that instinct which so often bids us too truly prepare for the worst, what may be in store for him when he gets there, Lord Amat, with the calmness born of practice in command and danger, brings them all in a second to their senses.

"Pray be seated, ladies all. Beauchamp, Trevor, look to them. They can do no good on deck; they only impede. Follow me, boys;" and with a bound he is half way up the hatchway.

'Tis too true; Charlie has gone overboard.

Reaching over to get the plaid that Lady Alice wanted, he did not see the boom, which, swinging at the instant of the tack, had swept him off the deck. The helmsman's cry brought Hamish to the spot in time to see him sink like lead. Three orders given in as many seconds, and he too was struggling with the waters and King Death for the young life of one whom he loved not less than his own four sons.

Those only who have witnessed such a scene by day, can realize the awfully helpless feeling produced by seeing how the way the ship has on carries her from the drowning man.

As Lord Amat and the others reach the deck, they rush to the side in time to see the gig already in the water, and, some hundred yards beyond, old Hamish battling with the tide, as

with something in his grasp he strikes out for the buoy.

“Thank God! he has got him,” cry they all together.

“Pull, Donald! Alastair! as you never pulled before,” shouts the unhappy father, as he recognizes poor Charlie’s form in the grip of Hamish.

But they need no such exhortation. Is not the Master their foster-brother, who has ever been less of lord than kinsman to them from their earliest days? And their father too! Can he, clothed and burdened as he is, maintain his strength and hold?

And as their hearts are riven by these thoughts, the stout ash oars bend to their terrific strokes, until the anxious lookers-on fear yet another evil—a broken blade.

A few more seconds, and with all their efforts they might have been too late.

“Your boat-hook, Angus Mohr,” cries Hamish to the bowman, as with racing speed they crash down towards the buoy, on which poor Charlie’s

lifeless body lies now across, while his rescuer treads the water.

With what tender quickness they lay him in the boat, and, turning back, pull harder than before, if that be possible.

“Saved! saved!” rings down to them below, while yet their terror-stricken hearts have hardly realized the fearful danger to one who, but a few short minutes gone, as men count time, had been as they were.

Yet Lady Amat, not unused in earlier days to look at death, has not lost her wits or sense of need of preparation. With the aid of Mrs. Beauchamp, who too has seen something of the rougher side of life, her cabin is got ready, blankets are made hot, and stone bottles filled with boiling water. So that by the time Charlie’s dripping body is carried down below the others have been got away, and no precious time is lost in doing all they know to restore the animation.

For long they persevere with all the patience and the skill they can command, but at last it seems as if indeed he is gone beyond recovery.

“Hoist the signal of distress ; perhaps that steamer may have a doctor on board,” suggests Ronald, who has been a miserable and helpless spectator of his best friend’s terrible accident.

“Ay, ay, sir,” cries Hamish, shaking the salt water from him like a spaniel, and but little affected apparently by his exertions ; “she’ll pe shure too haf some poddy tat weel pe goot for a seek maun.”

Hardly has the signal been shaken out, when the steamer, which is bound for Fort William, alters her course, and bears down upon them.

A few hurried words of explanation and commiseration, and presently one of those to whom we all turn at some period of our lives, for ourselves or those dear to us, as if they hold the gates of life and death, is standing by Charlie’s side.

Rapidly examining and questioning, he quickly perceives the true cause and extent of the harm done.

“He is only stunned, my lord ; the suspended animation is even now beginning to return, and, persevering with the remedies you have already

employed, I do not think you need have much fear of grave consequences. But if you like I will remain with you."

His light baggage is speedily transferred, and the 'Cygnet,' spreading her wings, flies homewards under the freshening breeze, as if she too rejoices, and cannot too quickly take the beloved Master back to the nest he has so nearly deserted for ever.

CHAPTER V.

“The gaudy, blabbing, and remorseful day is crept into the bosom of the sea.”—*Captain, in K. Henry VI.*

THANKS to the thoughtful skill of the doctor, who turns out to be a well-known London physician on his way to Dunrobin, the yacht is not back at her anchorage before Charlie's senses return, and, though much shaken, he recognizes those about him without difficulty.

Lady Alice's kinder and better nature had suffered tortures in thinking why she had sent him so nearly to his death; but—alas! that it should be so—the more worldly side of her character resumed its ascendancy, as it too often does with us all, when the strain of anxiety was removed.

The fearful dread when they learned that it was their bright and loved companion who was on the brink of eternity, the sickening suspense as they heard the shouts to the men in the boat, the intense relief when the cry of "Saved!" brought instantaneous joy, were common to all on board; but who can picture the shades of feeling with which the mother and Clarice listened?

Watching the poor girl, whose features recorded only too plainly all the agony she was passing through, the heart of the scheming woman of the world had hardened once again when, unable to support the sudden reaction from despair, Clarice sank to the floor, unheeded for the moment, as Charlie was brought below.

"So!" she soliloquized, when at last she helped her to a sofa; "it has got so far as this, has it? Things look ill for Julia's chance, then, unless some change should come about. But how?"

Seldom does the brightest morning fulfil its promise. Who would recognize the merry party who only a few hours ago came off so joyously

in the groups of silent anxious friends who with much solicitude wait for Charlie's landing?

As they wend their way slowly up the steep ascent behind the stalwart boat's crew, who, slinging him in a hammock, are quickly at the Castle, Ronald Elliot attaches himself to Clarice, whose most expressive silence has touched him greatly.

"What a splendid old fellow Hamish is, Miss Beauchamp. Had he not jumped at once, just as he stood, I doubt if we should have seen dear old Charlie again. As we got on deck we saw him dive,—it seemed an age until he reappeared, and we could see he had brought him up. But," he adds, in a lighter tone, seeing that she is unable to talk quietly of it yet, "he must be more of a sea-otter than most of these Western Highlanders generally are, for few men could do so much even unencumbered with their clothes."

"Ah! Captain Elliot, if it was trying for you to see, how much more terrible it must have been for his poor mother below, paralyzed with

fear, and forbidden to hope she could stretch a finger out to save him? We women can do so little, I always think, in times of peril."

"Yet only half the work was done when he was brought on board. If it had not been for the forethought which prepared everything, and the loving nursing he has had since, it would have gone very hard with him, I fancy. If we had been blessed with many such gentle hands and ready comforts in the East, a goodish lot of fellows would not be lying there now."

As was his object, Clarice's thoughts are diverted from the present anxiety for the moment, as they fly back to the horrors of the first dread winter, when every mail seemed to bring fresh tidings of trials and disaster.

"Yes," she said; "even out of that great mass of suffering grew a blessing, since it has taught us anew the old lesson of the good Samaritan; and that women may indeed work in the widest sense to alleviate pain instead of remaining at home only to weep."

"Ah! It was marvellous to see many of

those delicate-looking ladies—whose first impulse one would think was to faint at the sight of what made strong men nearly sick—how they braced themselves up and went through the hideous ordeal of nursing wounds in the over-crowded hospitals at Scutari. Yet there are men of the old school who say that the undoubted mitigation of the horrors of war is not altogether an unmixed advantage.”

“Show me any one good which may not, by perverted minds, be so discredited, and it may be worth while to listen to such an argument. I believe a foundation has been laid which will not only go far to rob war of one of its greatest horrors, but will give women, in the happily more extended times of peace, a field for sympathetic labour for which many have long craved.”

“Speaking generally, I agree with you,” says Elliot; “but I confess I do not think I should like any one very dear to me to enter such a mission.”

“Like all men!” retorts Clarice with a faint smile. “You would freely accept the attentions

of all the rest of the sex provided you could keep your own women under lock and key ! ”

“ No, no ! you do me injustice there, really. I meant only that there is much, very much, that a woman, especially a refined one, must find repugnant when she leaves the shelter of her own home and goes out to face the rougher side of life, which is inseparable from attempts to close the wounds, material and moral, to which her altered daily existence will surely expose her.”

“ But there are many men who, I am told, are as sensitive and gentle as we are supposed to be, though brave as lions and firm as rocks in hours of trial. Are we so very different ? I think your argument is not quite sound—though I fear that, as a rule, Kingsley’s touching words will remain true to the end.”

When they reach the Castle the cheering news is sent down from the sick-room that the doctor’s diagnosis is correct, and that in a day or two the Master may be about as well as ever.

Hamish had quietly followed to hear the last

report before turning in. The quick eye of the doctor, as he descends to the hall, catches sight of him standing on the terrace in the gloaming.

“Ah! Lord Amat, from what I hear, nothing but the quick presence of mind and cool courage of that magnificent old ‘Salt’ could have saved you this day from a terrible sorrow.”

“Yes, doctor; he has done for my son what some five-and-twenty years ago he did in another way for me. Such deeds cannot be repaid. I could not even if he would let me. You have spoken to him? No!”

Turning to a window he calls, “Hamish.”

In a moment the noble old man enters.

With a simple dignity he quickly crosses the hall, and bending one knee he seizes and kisses Lord Amat’s hand.

“’Tis well,” he speaks in Gaelic. “The seer was right. But the third time ’twill not be my Lord, nor the Master, nor myself, who will be called, but my Duncan.”

Ere they can recover their surprise or stop him he is gone. But the doctor, who is much im-

pressed by the incident, makes a note thereof, as Lord Amat interprets for the benefit of the ignorant.

“My dear fellow,” says Colonel Trevor, taking him by the hand with that true grip which betokens all that in most other lands is grotesqued by unmanly kisses; “you know how I congratulate you—and if heroes are of their mother’s fibre your boy should win a bâton. I never saw more nerve and promptitude of action than Lady Amat showed to-day throughout the trying time you left her in my care.”

“Good friend,” is all the answer; but the eye speaks what the tongue, with the reserve natural to Englishmen, does not give vent to.

Somewhat done up, the ladies are not sorry to follow the example of their hostess, who had retired early to her room.

As they hand their candles to their especial friends, the three young soldiers may express by tender look or gentle pressure more than is heard, but, at any rate, when the Castle regulation silver coggie of nightly porridge and cream

is being discussed, with other matters, in Eila's room, there is that light in the eyes of the fair ones as they talk over the events of the day, which, perhaps, it is as well for the peace of the younger smokers that they cannot see.

"That was a near thing for Charlie," says Fergus, after they have sat for some minutes in uncommon silence, while the fragrant cloud floats soothingly about them.

"Yes, by Jove ! If Hamish had been a trifle less quick all round he must have gone, I fancy."

"What is his history ? He seems a rare old 'Salt,' and is as good as he looks, I should think, General."

"You are right there, Elliot ; he is no ordinary man. But that Amat is a peer, their lives have run in very similar grooves. They shared the same milk in their infancy ; they grew up together. When Amat went to sea, Hamish joined the service with him, and was soon shoved up the ladder, thanks to his education, smartness, and good looks. When that scrimmage took place in Albania, of which I told you the other

day, he fought like a lion beside him, and saved his life at the expense of that scar you see across his forehead. Afterwards, when the old lord died and they settled down at home, Hamish's wife helped to rear Charlie, for Lady Amat never was very strong after she came to this country, so that the fostering tie has endured for two generations. And, as you have seen, the devotion is not confined to one or either side."

"Yes, no doubt of that. When Charlie came to us he brought with him the finest recruits the Light Company have had for many a day in two of Hamish's sons."

"Ah!" remarks Trevor, "if the powers that be would only study common sense and human nature a little more, they might overcome some of the difficulties for the army which are looming in the near distance with high wages and the spread of education."

"Any news from India, General? ' asks Ian.

"There is that," he answers, somewhat solemnly, laying down the *Times*, "which I fear

will add many a heartache to the thousands already bleeding.

“We shall have to put out all our strength to stop the progress of this insurrection, or it will master us. It’s strange that the native prediction should be working towards its own fulfilment.”

“One would have thought our experience in the last two or three years would have taught us the folly of reducing our strength. The Joe Hume school of economy has much to answer for ; the savings its doctrine produced were swallowed up a thousand times in the extravagant efforts to force hastily the strength which time and experience alone can bring to effective maturity. Truly, despotism has some advantages as well as constitutional government. However, perhaps, better the devil you know than another ! What is the prophecy you were speaking of, Beauchamp ?”

“Oh, I heard it out there long ago. I wonder you didn’t. The natives declare that John Company will come to an end a hundred years after Plassey. Should that be so, their time is nearly up. But if India does change hands,

there are many who will regret the much-abused 'Kumpani Behadur,'—though the pagoda-tree of Fame don't shed rupees as it used to do."

"It's not a bad school for soldiers anyhow, Beauchamp," says Trevor. "The Sikhs in our time gave us as hard a job to win our spurs as one might wish. And, if these Pandies be fairly led, you boys may find your work cut out for you. I suppose you'll go before long?"

"I got a letter just now from the Adjutant," answers Cameron. "He tells me that Sir Colin saw him for a few minutes as he flashed through Dover the other night, and I gather from what he hints that we and several other regiments are to follow him as quick as may be. But there we are again! under our strength through giving a hundred and fifty of our best men to the Sutherlands, when they sailed for China last month; and to make up our numbers we shall have to take a lot of strangers ignorant of the traditions of the regiment and its officers. It's maddening when one thinks that not long

ago we had twelve hundred men in the ranks, fit to go anywhere and do anything."

"Ay, sent adrift to save a few hundreds, when thousands are wasted annually on clerks and others who do little heavier work than read the morning papers, mend their pens and their errors. I wish I had the power, I would undertake to provide an army twice as efficient, at less expense than ours costs now."

"How would you do that, Elliot?" asks the General with a smile.

"Do away first, Sir," replies 'Paul,' so called because of his adventures in many parts, "with that very expensive article, red tape; it swaddles in futile extravagance the mind of every one it touches. But," stopping abruptly, "when I get on this subject I am, like a clock lately wound up, bound to go till run down. A book would hardly hold all I could say about it."

"I know," agrees Ian. "But you and I will be somewhat thicker in the girth and thinner in the thatch ere we see anything done that will stand wear. We'll go on tinkering and pottering

until some fine day we are caught in our self-satisfied slumber by some wide-awake enemy who knows our weak points, and how to hit us. Then who will cry out 'peccavi'?"

"I have just come from Charlie," says Lord Amat, entering the billiard-room. "He is wonderfully better, and actually talked of going to the hill to-morrow. That, I think, is impossible. However, I have made arrangements for you boys to go; and as you know a very early start is necessary, if you want to be back to dinner by canonical hours, I would recommend your turning in soon. Fergus, will you command in our absence?"

After they had gone, turning eagerly to his old friends, he says, "Tell me, what is this I hear about their regiment going out? Is it likely?"

"More than that," answers the General. "I do not see how it can be otherwise. As far as I can gather, every man that may be spared must go, and quickly, if they wish to keep India. There will be none too many, Amat."

“God’s will be done ! But how am I to break it to his mother ? Her anxiety during the Crimean business nearly killed her ; but from India what ages of suspense she must endure !”

“It is terribly hard, I know,” says Trevor ; “especially just when you have got him back ; but, as I saw to-day, she has plenty of the right metal, and will bear bravely if struck fairly. Say nothing to-night, but in the morning, when you are both less unstrung than you must be after such a day as this, break the news to her, lest it come suddenly, when she may feel it crushingly.”

“Yes, that is my dread.”

CHAPTER VI.

“ I take thee at thy word ; call me but love, and I’ll be new baptised.”—*Romeo*.

AT breakfast next morning they are all reassured as to Charlie, by his mother’s cheerful replies to their various inquiries, of which none are sweeter to her than that of Clarice, whose prime favourite she has been since her childhood, when the Beauchamps began their annual visits to the Castle.

“ Yes, dear. The doctor says there is not a trace of fever left, and if he will only keep quiet for a day or so he will suffer no ill effects from the blow, or his immersion. Of course he laughed at the idea of his going to the hill to-day, but promises he may come down to luncheon if he

behaves himself as an invalid," replies the happy mother, with a smile which shows the anxiously-watchful Trevor that his friend has not yet told her of the too probable contingency of the party being broken up at any moment.

Happily the post arrives in the evening only, so there is not the usual chance of an unguarded exclamation in the perusal of the correspondence conveying suddenly the fearful blow he knows the news will be to her.

As if reading his mind, Lord Amat says, "I thought it better to send the youngsters to the forest early this morning. When Charlie knew they were gone he reconciled himself quickly enough to his temporary imprisonment, which I dare say we can manage to make little irksome to him."

"That reminds me," says Lady Amat, "that we must send over to Fort William for the Doctor's luggage. I have persuaded him to stay a few days, though he declares that as far as his patient is concerned he might go at once."

"We are in luck, then," remarks the General;

“for, off duty, there is not a more agreeable fellow anywhere.”

“This is too charming a day to spend at home though, if I may make such an unhostess-like speech, as I must stay behind. Will you devise some plans, Lewis? A pic-nic to Clach Mohr might catch the stalkers on their way home, though rather late perhaps; and if you care to make yourself and the drag useful, you might drive over for the luggage, and get the letters a little earlier.”

As they rise from the breakfast-table Lady Amat begs no one will sacrifice themselves on her account, unless Mrs. Beauchamp thinks she can spare Clarice to stay at home with her?

With ill-repressed chagrin, Lady Alice sees this consented to, without the power of altering an arrangement which must assuredly throw into dangerous propinquity the two people whom she wishes so much to keep asunder.

Accordingly she and General Beauchamp arrange to go with Lord Amat on his coach, while all the others and the doctor, who, in

addition to his many pleasant talents, is a first-rate botanist, are to make their way to Clach Mohr; the younger ones devoutly hoping their party may be increased ere the day comes to an end.

The afternoon is getting on when Charlie manages to find his way downstairs. His mother has told him how the party have disposed themselves, and, as she has gone to her own room to write, he is not surprised to find Clarice sitting alone, from her attitude somewhat pensive, in the library. He lingers a moment or two as he enters, for something tells him he may venture now, if ever, to ask her love; and yet if failure follows, as well it may, what will the colour of his life be hereafter?

Looking up at the sound of his footstep, she hastens at once, with a glad smile, to meet him.

“Charlie! Is it really wise of you to come down so soon? You are feeling better? The doctor said you would not suffer long; but oh! when I think of that awful cry, and then the knowledge that it was you who were struggling

in the water—most mercifully we did not know how helplessly—it seems almost miraculous that you are now here, so ——”

Sinking into a low chair beside her, he takes her hand, as he says in tones of passionate tenderness :

“ At last ! Clarice. I dare not run the risk of any more such blows as Fate so nearly dealt me yesterday. In the flashing seconds before I lost my head my thoughts flew back to you, and the last was, ‘ Why have I never told her my love ? ’ You have guessed it ! I was trying to do so when Cousin Aline sent me on deck. And now, darling !—may I not call you so ?—you know I have loved you always, from the time when I first learned how fascinating it was to try and fathom the meaning of those sweet, bewildering eyes. If I had not known it before, the dreary days of the past two years of separation would have taught me what my life without you will be. Have I dared to hope overmuch ? Were those sweet bygone times, which gave me courage to wait, only vain dreams ? or did you feel

and think of them as I did? Sweetheart—darling—tell me. Have I been all this time in a fool's paradise? or may I seize—at last—the happiness I have hungered for so long?”

But not a word comes from the averted lips.

Half-frightened at her prolonged silence, his arm steals round her softly, and, drawing her gently towards him, at last she turns her head.

He needs but little more. Her face, though deadly pale, is lit up by the ineffable happiness of given and accepted love—of that true metal which once coined is never debased, or exchanged for anything less sterling if the recipient be worthy.

Nearer and nearer he draws down her loveliness, until, at last, his lips touch hers in all the ecstasy of that first long burning kiss of passionate devotion, which is never so freely given as by the apparently cold, proud woman, who loves once but for aye.

For a few seconds she lies thus in his arms, while she whispers :

“So you have loved me, Charlie, all the time like this! Shall I tell you that I often wondered if you did, or if it was only my vanity which prompted me to think it might be so? When you were in the Crimea, sometimes I had a sort of glimpse of my own feelings, but never until now did I know how dear you are to me. Yesterday indeed showed what my life would be without you.”

“Then, sweetheart, we must think what we can offer Cousin Aline, for it seems to me that but for her you would have evaded the question until, in my despair, I might have prostrated myself at the feet of her Julia.”

“Charlie! But seriously, do you know I am not altogether sure that Lady Alice will approve of this arrangement of yours. Have you had any passages with her daughter, sir?”

“On my honour, no! What can suggest such a thing to you?”

“I can’t say; except that I have once or twice caught your cousin’s eye fixed on me with no very friendly expression, while it seemed to me

that every now and then she manœuvred with an object."

"Ah! that's a way women of her time and kind of life get into; but, whatever she may think, nothing can ever now come between us. You know I am not given to promiscuous admiration. Besides I never had the wish, and lately little opportunity, to fritter away in desultory skirmishes what I knew I must reserve to carry such a stronghold as your great, proud heart."

"*Tant mieux!* But how about Julia herself?"

"I am very sure she can have no cause to think I have ever been more than cousin to her; and, if I am not mistaken, Master Ian is very likely to dispute any attempt to interfere with his pretensions in that quarter, where I know he has certainly been much *épris* since they met at Ascot. It was at the same time that 'Ottle' made such an impression on the tinder-like Fergus, when we all went over from Aldershot. It was quite as much for their happiness, poor moths, as my own pleasure, that I brought them up here."

“Upon my word! I had no idea you were such an *intrigant*. Is Captain Elliot also included in your little arrangements? I fancy he is already ‘flattened’ by *ma belle* Eila, and I am inclined to think she is not ill-pleased with him. At which I do not wonder,” she adds, with a blushing smile.

“Ah! He is a dangerous boy, Paul. Like his great namesake, he can be all things to all women. He has not been trying his hand on with you, has he?” This in a slightly anxious tone.

“I think him very good-looking, Mr. Othello, and ‘vastly agreeable,’ as old Lady William would say; but, you know,” with a mischievous laugh, “you have given him but small opportunity of trying anything on with me!”

“*Méchante!*”

CHAPTER VII.

“What is this forest called?”—*Scroop*.

To get to the forest from the castle is a comparatively easy matter, as things go, but it necessitates an early start; and at six o'clock, Ian, Fergus, and Ronald find themselves on the hill ponies which are to take them as far as the shieling of Clach Mohr, some ten miles off, at the head of Glen Rua.

As they ride along the ascending path in that keen mountain air, redolent of the combined odours arising from the dew-besprinkled earth, the dripping birks, the scented gale, the golden broom, the ever-sweetest briar, they cannot but draw rein sometimes to look back at the extending view. At first the old castle, nestling, as it

seems, in the soft birch woods, with its grim grey walls and rugged outlines, lies at their feet. Yet lower, and the 'Cygnet' sleeps with folded wings on the still blue water, which but yesterday had so nearly overwhelmed their comrade in its fatal depths. Beyond, the hills, which to two of them, at least, speak of times and deeds that need no echo,—Lochiel ! Glencoe ! What Cameron or Macdonald can look on them without that stirring of the soul which men call by different names ?

“This is pleasanter, Paul, than shivering in the trenches or on picquet from that hideous hour before daylight which everybody knows is so exactly the attacking one that no one so employs it.”

“Yes ; and, as usual when the Fates, kindly or otherwise, order me out of my lair on such a morning as this, I wonder how any one can be such a pig as ever to stay later in it. Early rising must be demoralizing. What superior beings we feel as we look upon the castle, and think of all the drones slumbering in their cells !

Why are they not drinking in this glorious air? which, excuse the Sassenach simile, is like the best champagne, dry and exhilarating, but not intoxicating."

"Hark to him, Fergus! The Lowland loon, aptly comparing himself to the unclean animal, can think of nothing but his trough, even when he professes to be most romantic. Were 'the Trevor' but here, how poetically he would have quoted—shall we say declaimed?"

"Shut up, Glencoe! or there may be a Macdonald less presently, and move on; or that 'royal' the old lord is so anxious one of us should get will not be gralloched to-day."

Arrived at the shieling, a charming forest lodge, built of and lined with pine wood, from the old natural firs, many of which still remain scattered here and there, like ancient giants, in the glen, they attack, with all the zest produced by early rising, mountain air, and vigorous youth, the scalding porridge and thick cream, the fresh broiled salmon, and tender venison steaks, which old Kirsty knows so well how to provide.

After that the pipe, par excellence.

And, as they stretch full length upon the purple, blooming heather, enter Rory Ross.

With his clean-cut features, hawk-like eye, tall, lithe, and sinewy, he is a splendid type of his clan. Bred in the Balnagowan Forest, he came, a lad, to Lord Amat, with whom he has been for many years, and now knows every inch of ground and stag of note for miles round.

Like all his school, his manners are more perfect than his English. Lifting his bonnet with the air of a prince, he says :

“ Gut mornen, shentlemens. His lordship orders tat we must na pe late to-daay ; an’ when Benquoich is reddy we will pe moven.”

“ All right, Rory,” says Fergus, springing to his feet ; “ but we have not drawn lots yet. Here, Paul, are three bits of grass. The puller of the longest from my hand goes to stalk in Corrie Voe, the shortest takes Cairn Dubh, and the other such luck as the Loch Corr beat may give. By Jove ! you’ve got the Cairn. In this

hot weather the biggest stags are sure to be on the tops, but you've a tidy climb before you, so I'd be off. You take Hector Fraser there ; and, —a word in your ear, old chap,—as you have never been out stalking before, don't let him have all the fun. He is as keen as mustard, knows the ground better than any fox or eagle in the forest, and will bring you, if it be possible, within shot of any stag you may spy, but when he has got you there he has a trick of making those who will stand it bury their heads in the heather while he gazes his fill at the beast, and then, when perhaps it has begun to move, he will shove the rifle into your hands with an adjuration, happily in Gaelic, which may or may not result in a snap shot and much discomfiture. Good luck ! and, mind, we meet here at six, or as near that as may be."

Nothing loth, Ronald goes off at score, followed, for the time, by Hector, a ghillie, and a brace of deer-hounds.

"At that pace, Ian, he won't be long doing his four miles ; and as you have got Corrie Voe,

into which he may move some deer, I would not lose any time either."

"Good! But the wind is easterly. It is still early. I am not a Gordon Cumming, so if I —"

"Which, being interpreted, signifies that after satisfying the blood-thirsty instincts of Donald Bain by a simple stalk up wind, you mean as speedily as possible to bask in the warmth of the charming Julia's eyes. I know the sort of feeling. As long as one's head don't go, it's the pleasantest thing out. You know Clach Mohr is a favourite expedition of our hostess, and I should not wonder on our return here to find ——"

"Fergus, it seems to me a fellow-feeling makes you wondrous kind! Is there no chance of the slender Olive straying so far?"

"Stranger things have happened. ' *Quien sabe,*' as the scorpion says. Take Donald, or Rory if you will, and let us be moving, or they'll think we have shot so many Cossacks we care little for the nobler animal."

"Thanks. I'll stick to Bain; we know each other's ways. I fear you have drawn badly

in Loch Corr, but the 'day is young — *au revoir*."

"Now, Rory," says Fergus, as Macdonald goes off round the shoulder of the hill with the long swinging step of a man to the heather born ; "what do you think of my chance to-day ?"

"'Deed an 'deed put 'tis no ta pest pate at al, at al, whatever ; put too pe shurelee she did na saw since a long time sich a het simmer ; an ta puir pastes er jist wild wi ta meedjees. She's thinken Benquoich ull no pe haven ta ferry worrst pate after al. She wass spyin last necht, an she did saw ta mickle staig gae down by ta loch, an maybe Benquoich ull pe shuten him tis day whatever."

"At Loch Corr last night ! Rory, Rory, why did you not tell me this sooner, and I would have given Captain Elliot the chance ?"

"'Deed put she wass thinken o' tat ; put maype ta Capten he wud na shute sa weel ass Benquoich."

"Well, well, 'tis too late now ; besides, he drew his lot, and as far as that goes it may be

the best yet. Which end of the loch was it at, Rory ?”

“It wass dune py ta sooth said tat she did saw him last necht too pe shurelee.”

“Then we shall have to look sharp, Rory, for if Captain Macdonald sends any deer out of Corrie Voe, they’ll be sure to disturb that side of Loch Corr.”

And away they stride, with the air of men who, having something weighty on their minds, are determined to bring it to a satisfactory issue, if that be possible, without delay.

After about an hour’s sharp walking, Rory, who keeps in front, suddenly throws himself on his face, a manœuvre which Fergus appreciates too well not to follow instantly.

Cautiously the old stalker pulls out his glass and spies long and carefully. At last without a word he passes it back to Fergus, who has waited patiently, knowing how keenly he enjoys every detail, except the final one, to which custom has in some degree blunted him.

“Yes, I see him, Rory ; at least he is a ‘royal,’

and a big one. But what a place of safety he has put himself into ! ”

While he yet speaks something seems to disturb the stag, for he rises, and brushing either flank with his antlers, he shows himself in all his glory. Undoubtedly it is the one they seek, long famous.

Although fully a mile off and up wind, they instinctively speak in whispers as they lie watching him for half-an-hour or more while he feeds away from them. At last he lies down again about a hundred yards from a burn which runs into the loch from the south.

“ Hoich ! tat weel do ferry wel, Benquoich ; put we maun pe ferry queeck whatever.”

In a few hurried words the plan on which they decide is, to fall back about half a mile, get round to the south side of the ridge which lies between Corrie Voe and Loch Corr, and striking the top of the burn near which the stag is now lying, follow its course until they get within range.

There are several difficulties in the way which

make them feel anything but confident of success.

At any moment Ian, who happily had gone to the south side of Corrie Voe, may move some deer out of it, and, by no uncommon ill-luck, right over the ridge sufficiently near to disturb their stag. Again, they have at least half-an-hour's sharp walking before they can reach the burn ; it would be no discredit to the best of stalkers if they take the wrong one out of the half-dozen which furrow that face ; and lastly, in their enforced absence from view of the stag, he may move into fresh ground, possibly down wind from them as they descend towards the loch.

Fortunately the east wind has drawn the deer generally towards the top of the corrie, and as the ground is very rough, they manage to get along a little below the ridge without stumbling upon anything, until Rory, looking over it, beckons to Fergus, and with a rush they find themselves in a slight hollow, which, as it gathers water, gradually deepens and widens until the

burn, now shrunk by the summer droughts to a gentle rill, in winter flings itself into the loch a foaming torrent.

Frequently, as they slowly and noiselessly progress, Rory stops to spy, but nothing can be seen. Has he gone? Have they taken the wrong burn? The suspense is terrible. But Rory will not be hurried. He may be gone? Rory does not think so; but for the alternative, implying an ignorance of the ground!

Fergus, silenced if not convinced by the noiseless argument, follows on; until at last his thoughts are somewhat rudely interrupted by Rory, who, slightly above, seizes him by the collar of his jacket and throws him on his back. Looking up he sees Rory lying flat, with a light on his face which tells him much.

At last, when it seems impossible for Fergus longer to bear the trickling cold of the drip from the peat hag which falls from the edge, runs down his back, and soaks his kilt as he lies in the arrested water, Rory ventures to move forward, and taking off his bonnet, raises himself inch by

inch over the top of the small brae which hides them.

Following suit, Fergus, crawling on his stomach, gains a similar position, and, guided by Rory's finger, sees, about two hundred yards from where they lie, the object of many a fruitless stalk.

Only the year before, Charlie himself after four hour's hard work had just got within shot, and Rory was grimly calculating how they could get him home, when an old cock grouse sprang up, crowing loudly, at their feet ; in another moment the stag was bounding down the hill, and the bullet flattened on a stone an inch or so above his shoulder.

Even Rory's veteran hand trembles now a little with suppressed excitement, as he takes the rifle out of its cover and draws back the bolts.

"Diaoul !" he mutters, as he looks in vain for a better chance. No strategist could have taken up a safer position than the wary stag.

On the edge of a small plateau, he commands a view of nearly the whole basin of Loch Corr.

At his back is a large boulder, which conceals all but his shoulders and his splendid head.

If they go lower down, the eddy from the abruptly rising ground on the other side of the burn may carry back their wind to him. If they whistle to make him move, such an old stager may with one bound put himself in safety over the edge of the ground on which he is lying.

There is nothing for it but to try and hit him between the shoulders as he is. No one knows better than Fergus how often such a shot is missed, even by the best men.

Old hand as he is at this kind of thing, twice he puts up his rifle and takes it down again.

“If I miss him, Rory?”

“She wass mony a time wi Benquoich, an niver did she saw Benquoich mak wan mees whativer.”

What a thing it is to know the gallery is with you!

Fergus holds his breath, pulls himself together, and then the trigger. Not a move! The stag

lies there as unconcerned apparently as if he scorned to notice either noise or bullets.

“Tat’s na cannie ! Pless me ! Put she wass thinken tat ta pal struck fair to pe shurelee. Thry wance mor, Benquoich.”

Again the rifle cracks, but with a similar result.

Superstitious as all Highlanders, stout-hearted as they are, Fergus and Rory look at each other with blank and somewhat anxious faces ; but, practical as ever, Rory quickly loads, and giving Fergus back the rifle, says—

“ ‘Deed an if ta paste pe sleepin, maype Benquoich caun shute him closer ; ” and, suiting the action to the word, they crawl warily but rapidly down the hill, at every yard fearing to see him gallop off. At last they reach the very boulder-stone and look quietly over.

Still lies the stag as when they saw him first.

But Rory’s practised eye more quickly guessed the truth. The ‘Pritchett’ had made no blunder. The first ball had struck him full on the spine just between the shoulders, the second only an inch aside ; and death had been so instan-

taneous that the noble head alone had moved a little and rested on the heather.

“Tat’s ferry goot, Benquoich ; a ferry prettie paste, an weel shute tu, whativer,” is all that Fergus heard at that moment of quick revulsion which comes to many of us when we see the life-blood we have spilt for love of sport.

In a few minutes Rory is busy with the necessary duties of the gralloch, and after pulling the stag into a hollow, covering him up with some long heather, and tying a handkerchief to his head to keep the eagles and the foxes off, is ready for another stalk.

Not so Fergus.

“Rory, I’ll kill no smaller stag to - day. There is not a finer in the forest. Go back to the sheiling, and send a pony to fetch this home. I’ll bathe in the loch and then follow you.”

CHAPTER VIII.

“ But what is the sport, Monsieur ? ”—*Touchstone*.

As the day wears on, Mrs. Beauchamp, the Campbells, Eila, her father, and the Doctor make ready for their picnic at Clach Mohr.

Not without grave misgiving does Lady Alice leave the coast clear for the descent of the enemy. No one knows better than she how easily hearts are caught and held after such a scene as they had gone through the day before.

However, bowing to the inevitable for the moment, and wise enough to provide herself as far as possible with more than one string to her bow, she has given Julia the cue, and is prepared to take events as they present themselves, with the resolution and resource of a thorough general.

Thus then the party starts, shorn of its due proportion of attendant cavaliers, but some of them at least devoutly trusting in a brighter disposition ere they return.

As they mount the glen in picturesque file, while the stalwart kilt-clad ghillies add the element of life which the surrounding scenery alone requires, there comes over them that joyous sense of existence which the combination of mountainous country, glorious weather, and pleasant companionship seldom fails to produce.

Arrived at the shieling, the more prosaic demands of nature assert themselves, as they always do on such occasions, somewhat loudly.

Be it the unaccustomed exercise or the generally protracted hour, there is ever a gusto with which *al fresco* meals are attacked which the aldermanic banquetter may sigh for in vain.

The Doctor, armed with the necessary equipment, speedily thereafter goes in quest of sundry additions which he hopes to make to his collection.

Mrs. Beauchamp and Colonel Trevor, reclining

under some magnificent old birch trees, are watching the saltatory efforts of the salmon at the falls below them, in that state of beatitude so commonly accompanying the hour and the fulfilment of its pleasant duties.

Eila, Julia, and Olive, grouped together in the shade of the huge granite boulder which gives the Celtic name, "Big Stone," to the lodge, sit on the sweet short turf and gossip, while they sketch divers portions of the lovely panorama before them.

"I didn't know, Eila, that you had met any of Charlie's regiment before."

"But little more, Julia. Papa took me into their hospitable tent at Ascot, and several were introduced. The only one who made any impression was Captain Elliot."

"And that an agreeable one, I fancy!" says Olive, with a laugh.

"Yes," admits Eila, her colour rising a little. "He is very nice, and in addition to his undeniable good looks, he has that charm of manner which one associates more with the Austrian."

“ Ah, if our men would but waltz as they do,” acquiesces Julia. “ It is such a bore to be either bumped against every one in the room, have one’s dress torn to shreds, or sit, nearly as inane as many of the men look who stand in the doorways, while Mrs. A., B., or C., makes all the running.”

“ My dear Julia,” says Eila emphatically, “ never fancy for a moment that you can compete with a married woman who chooses to lay herself out to please promiscuously. She can afford to say and do so many things more or less *risqué*; the limit may be defined by the complaisance or experience of her husband, or the strength of her own head and heart. The genus is developing rapidly, and the next generation of girls will follow hard on their footsteps unless men change, which is not likely; for—though a pursuing animal by nature, he rather likes being run down sometimes.”

“ I don’t wonder,” murmurs Olive, sympathetically; “ it must save such a deal of trouble! But who have we here?” as some one approaches

in the distance. "Ah, it's Rory ; such a handsome man, my dear, but provokingly obscure in his dialect. Even his Gaelic is not like that of these parts. I wonder who he has been with ? Rory !" she calls out, as he is passing on towards the stables.

"Goot tay, leddies," he says, lifting his bonnet as he draws near. "'Tis a ferry long time tat she wass na hearin tat ta leddies wass na comin tu ta Norrth, whativer."

"Yes, Rory, we have not been here for a year or two, but I have not forgotten how you taught me to catch trout in Loch Craggie. Do you think we could do anything in the boat there this afternoon ?"

"Tu pe surelee, Mees Cawmill. Benquoich hass pin affter shutin ta mickle staig dune pye Loch Corr, an she wass jest goin tu sen ta pownee tu ta Loch tu pring ta paste tu Clach Mohr. Benquoich," he adds, with a slight movement of the muscles of his mouth, "wass na goin tu stalk anny mor whativer ; Benquoich wass comin pack tu Clach Mohr."

“Oh! that’s delightful,” says Julia, while Olive keeps a discreet silence; “we shall have some one at all events to help us in the boat. But wonders will never cease! Is that Captain Elliot that I see swinging down the hill over there?”

“To pe surelee, Mees Cawmill; maybe ta Captin ees wantin tu fesh in Loch Craggie.” This with perfect gravity.

And in a few minutes Ronald is giving an account of his proceedings.

Of course Hector Fraser had taken his own way, as Fergus had warned him, and twice, Ronald, who was by no means an indifferent shot, though without much experience beyond a smooth bore, had missed badly in the excitement of suddenly seeing a stag, for a moment stately and erect, a true monarch of his glen, and the next instant bounding down the hillside with antlers flung back, flying for dear life from his most dreaded foe.

At last in a third stalk Hector, partly seeing the cause of this, brought Ronald quietly and steadily up to a very fair stag.

Taking a deliberate aim he thought, unknown to Hector, he would add to the certainty by resting his rifle on a rock. Of course it threw high, and to his horror he saw the stag go away unhurt, while at some distance beyond lay an unhappy hind shot through both haunches !

“After that I felt I had better come home lest a worse thing might befall me,” says Ronald, with a cheery laugh, less perhaps the result of true philosophy than of seeing the good things kind fate had provided to compensate for his lack of skill or luck.

Hardly have they ceased laughing with him, when Fergus strides across the glen, and being congratulated on his success, deplored Rory’s reticence in the morning, which robbed Ronald of the chance.

“My dear fellow, I should have missed him to a moral, or smashed his antlers, or committed some infinite atrocity which could only have been atoned for by my permanent residence at the bottom of the loch.”

“Well, talking of that, we were meditating

an endeavour to catch some of the lovely Loch Craggie trout when we were surprised by your appearance. It is not often," says Olive, with a quick look at Eila, "that the forest is deserted so early in the day!"

"Nor often," replied Fergus, bowing low, with intention, towards her, "that the loch is so favoured. Let us try, Paul, to do honour to the occasion, and fill a basket to be remembered henceforth. The wind has gone round to the west; there are some clouds coming up, and in an hour or so if we don't find the fish asking to be caught by such hands, you may call me a cockney."

"I should be more tolerant of the species at Greenwich, Wimbledon, Richmond, and other places where they make themselves so obnoxious, if they would only look and dress like you!" thinks Olive, as she glances at his glowing face and stalwart figure.

Rory, having sent off a pony and ghillie for the stag, is already on his way with several others to Loch Craggie, which is within a stiffish mile of the Lodge.

This little loch, in its way a perfect gem, is richly set in old red crag, green woods, and purple heather, the edges serried by tiny bays, whose pellucid depths show the varied-coloured gravels, which, tossed by winter storms, form shelving banks in brilliant contrast to the grey, black, and rocky islets, where the sea-gull and the wild duck hatch their young in almost primeval peace.

Perched as it is some two thousand feet above the sea, the view is lovely, and few go there on summer days who do not carry away sweet memories of a landscape nearly perfect of its kind.

The trout, too, are famous for their size, beauty, and excellence. Imbued apparently with a spirit befitting such a birthplace, they give more sport with light tackle than many a lordly but sulky salmon.

With the wisdom of the sailor who knows the danger of a boat, Lord Amat insists on ladies always having a large one, in which they may move about without the risk of, or danger attending, an upset.

Pulled by four oars, the whole party find themselves ere long in that part of the loch which, Rory knows, will be most likely to yield good, and, what the fair sex likes above all things, quick, sport.

“I think,” says Fergus, “it may save some possible loss of time and temper if only two fish together—one at each end of the boat. It is not easy to prevent casting at the same moment if there are more, and then the results are tragic! If I may, I will endeavour to show Miss Olive how to wile the biggest trout. Perhaps, Paul, Miss Trevor will allow you to choose her flies?”

“And I?” inquired Julia, coquettishly.

“Ah,” replied Fergus, “if you would but sing something, what could we wish for more!”

“What shall it be then—Romantic, Aquatic, Celtic?”

“Why not the three in one?” suggests Ronald. “What more appropriate than a water-kelpie’s ode!”

“In Gaelic?”

“ Oh, no,” said Eila. “ It may be the oldest language in the world, but I cannot think a love song could sound soft in it.”

“ Would you prefer an English one ?” asked Ronald, with a tender inflection in his lowered voice.

“ That would so much depend upon the serenader,” replied Eila, turning her great soft eyes full upon him, suddenly, in such a way as makes even his practised heart beat fast, and his pulses throb quickly with a sensation he had not known since he found himself enthralled by his first enchantress.

“ On the whole,” says Julia, not unobservant of this byplay, and feeling herself somewhat out of it, “ I think I shall defer any attempt to charm you or the fishes by my unaided voice.”

“ May we hope then for a duet a little later ?” suggests Fergus, somewhat wickedly ; “ the absent deerslayer has rather a fine voice !”

“ That will depend upon circumstances as yet unforeseen, but even I can tell you that my sister will not get her first fish before Miss Trevor

if you are not more rapid in the selection of your cast."

"So?" says Ronald, as he hands the rod to Eila.

"Now if you are ready, and we are to make a basket, remember to cast alternately down wind, and then, keeping your bob-fly skipping on the top of the water, bring your line gradually round through the trough of it, not across the ripple. Strike the moment you see the fish break the surface, but not too quickly, for their mouths are as soft as their flesh is firm."

"A fair start and no favour!" remarks Julia, as she reclines luxuriously in a nest of plaids, while her shapely hand dabbles in the water.

"Excellent, Miss Trevor," cries Ronald a minute after, as a fine trout dashing at her tail-fly, a small "John Scott," is hooked by a skilful turn of her wrist, and, stung by the pain as well as the surprise, darts off taking line from the reel like a fresh run grilse. "Keep up the point of the rod; let him go, but not too freely; he will soon stop. Now wind up quickly, and bring him

near the boat. Ah, he's gone ! No, he must be well hooked. Don't be too hard on him though. By Jove ! he's a good trout. Give me the landing-net, Rory. Now then, gently. This way a little, please ; hang it ! is he off ? No ! yes ! ah ! there he is at last. First blood, Fergus, and a splendid fellow. Five pounds if he's an ounce. Isn't he, Rory ?"

"'Deed put she's no sayin, Captin, tat she ever did saw a mickle bonnier troot in ta loch, whativer."

"Ah," said Benquoich, stroking his moustache, "it's like your luck, Paul ; always first."

"Well," retorts Ronald laughing, "Miss Campbell has two on now ; land them for her, if you can. They are the liveliest little beggars I ever saw."

It's true ; but he does it, deftly. As was predicted, the breeze freshens, the clouds come up, and a gentle summer shower brings the trout to the surface, ravenous for their evening meal. Almost as quickly as they can strike and play them, the fair anglers, with the assistance of their

mentors, catch their fish ; and by the time they land, three large baskets containing as much as so many ghillies can carry home, show the result of their united skill.

“ Yes ; they are indeed fine trout,” says Ronald, as they leave the boat ; “ but I never make such a remark without thinking of the terrible blunder I made once.”

“ What was that ? ” asks Eila.

“ An old friend of mine—he was well on for seventy, with some fifteen thousand a year—was fascinated by a girl, uncommonly good-looking she was too, who threw over the poor fellow she was engaged to when old Dreghorn appeared on the scene. They were on their honeymoon tour when I came across them one Sunday at the Trossachs. He introduced me to his blushing bride, of whom I had never heard before, and insisted on my dining with them. As they seemed slightly bored with each other, I appeared to be rather appreciated, until the unhappy speech which has been a sort of nightmare to me ever since.

“ With a metaphorical flourish of trumpets the waiter staggered in with a large fish, boiled whole if you believe me, and put it on the table. Naturally we all said, ‘ What a splendid fish ! ’ But I, not content with such a prosaic remark, thinking I was going to say something rather smart, added, ‘ Ah ! yes, but I have always remarked that the finest salmon are caught with a golden hook ! ’

“ Poor Dreghorn !—he didn’t live a year after—glanced at me reproachfully in a manner I could not understand ; but she looked Juliet transformed into Lady Macbeth on the instant. In vain I cracked my choicest jokes, and I left them early, saddened but still unenlightened. In the morning I got a note from him—only three lines—they were enough :

“ ‘ My dear boy, we are off. Her name was Salmon. ’ ”

“ Ah ! ” says Fergus, as their laughter subsided, “ I have remarked whenever I have had the misfortune to come across honey-mooning couples that they are morbidly sensitive. Per-

haps the excessive amount of sweetness they imbibe impairs their digestions, and therefore their tempers. I would almost as soon interfere with a 'belling' stag in October as plunge into the domesticity of a newly-married pair. The wisest man of my acquaintance took away his bride in a yacht, and was no more seen until they had settled down into the normal state of blissful married life."

"Yes," rejoined Ronald, who is not overburdened with this world's gear; "it is wonderful how easy the chariot of existence rolls along if the axles be but golden."

"And yet, judging from daily experience, that does not prevent its upsetting, when, perhaps, the results are more disastrous than if the occupants were content with a less Sybaritic style of travelling through the world," says Eila, whose experiences of the discomforts of life are confined to the shortcomings of a courier, or the whims of an exacting *femme de chambre*.

"So much depends upon the charioteer, my dear Eila," says Julia, with an air of superior

wisdom ; “ I have seen people tumble over and go on again in a little with perfect equanimity.”

“ Yes ; if their skins be thick, or their bones tough as Jack Mytton’s, such a fall may do some good ; but as a rule,” observed Fergus, sententiously, “ I think there are few who are not shaky ever afterwards.”

“ It’s not always the pace that kills ; often one gets over a difficult place by it,” says Ronald. “ When I was driving our coach to Ascot one day I was horrified in the middle of the pitch below ‘ the Wheatsheaf ’ to see a drunken flyman suddenly dart out from a cross road, concealed by Scots firs, right under the leaders. The lady in the box beside me, a cool hand as you may imagine, said, ‘ I think I can catch that branch.’ The next instant, instead of the smash we all expected, I saw the plucky flyman, horse, and trap disappear in the ditch on our left. He couldn’t have done more had his name been Curtius.”

“ What was it ? What became of him, Captain Elliot ? ”

“Ah! who knows? I can only record his self-devotion; it was impossible to pull up at the pace we were going, with the crowd behind us, but from the cheers we heard I fancy he fell soft, as the inebriate generally do.”

“Bad examples, both, of reckless driving,” says Ian, with unusual bitterness in his tone; “it was your usual luck that saved a crash. The flyman had only his own neck to think of, but you had at least one lady on board, to say nothing of the grub and liquor of a hundred expectant fellows. It all comes of overdoing the pace. It don’t matter then how much ‘gilt’ the axles may be at the start, they’re bound to fail you, and then you’ll find fifty outsiders you never thought or heard of abusing you.”

“Captain Macdonald takes things *au grand sérieux* sometimes, apparently,” says Eila to Ronald, as after this the fishing party tails off, and they find themselves nearing the shieling in front of the others.

“It’s a way he has. Good fellow as ever

was ; there are more things locked up in him than any of us have yet got at. He has a grievance like most, perhaps, but it's not so often near the light as he brought it just now."

Eila muses as she steps firmly yet daintily along the slightly-worn track in the heather, while Ronald, sometimes on one side, now on the other, gives her the helping hand which the exigencies of the ground demand.

Does she fancy at times that he retains his hold a second longer than is absolutely necessary ? Is she displeased ? Who can tell ?

Suddenly she says, " You must have been very thankful that the drag did not upset when you had such a precious load ! "

Does Ronald smile as he reflects for an instant before answering ? " Yes ; you may fancy what my feelings were when I tell you that she— "

But the sentence is never finished, for Kirsty, darting out, overwhelms them with the news that Lady Amat has been taken suddenly and dangerously ill, and that the Doctor, happily caught, has gone off in haste to the castle.

CHAPTER IX.

“ Good news or bad, that thou com’st in so bluntly ? ”

King Richard III.

THE glorious weather, the charming scenery of the drive into Fort William, the cheery company, the sensations inseparable from sitting behind four good horses handled by an artist, all combine to dissipate the somewhat bitter thoughts with which Lady Alice had mounted the box, and they have not gone far ere she philosophically trusts to the chapter of accidents preventing that opportunity which she feels will bring about a situation she will find hard to overcome.

Picking up the Doctor’s luggage left by the steamer, Lord Amat drives on to the Post-office, coming from which they meet his local factor with

a face expressive of dolorous importance, while he holds the *Inverness Courier* in his brawny hands.

Pulling up to ask the news, Lord Amat says, "What's the matter, McPhee? You look as if something terrible had happened."

"Ah, me Lorr, I'se fearin' it ull no be guid tidings for yer lorrship, or me leddy. They're sayin' the master's ridgemint's orrderred to Injer at wance."

"Good God! is it so really?" he ejaculates, as, handing the reins to the General, Lord Amat descends rapidly from the box. Taking the paper, he reads only too certain confirmation of the rumour which had already spread; and when they get the letter-bag, the various official-looking letters addressed to his son and his friends leave no room for doubt that they are under orders.

It is an anxious drive home, and all his thoughts are directed to how he can best break the news to his wife.

"I wish, Beauchamp, I could have managed to

drop a hint of what you said last night; but poor Zoe was so taken up by our boy's accident that I could find no good opportunity of preparing her for what I fear is now inevitable, though any might have been better than some chance now conveying suddenly this terrible news to her."

"I would lose no time further in telling her, Amat; ill tidings fly fast, as we know too well."

The afternoon is not far spent when they return, and, taking his friend's advice, Lord Amat hurries at once in search of his wife.

But a little time before she, having finished her correspondence, came down to the library where she had left Clarice.

It needed no mother's eye to take in the true meaning of the tableau which met her glance as she came into the room.

For a moment the pang of maternal regret, which comes on such occasions to the most unselfish, was very keen, but in another minute she recognized all the joy of having such a daughter; and when Clarice, hurrying forward,

threw herself into her extended arms, each knew that no words were needed.

“Mother, dear,” said Charlie, “you see I have given you a daughter, and, in spite of the old saying, I shall not be the less your son that she has promised to be my wife.”

“My blessed boy, if you are half as good a husband as you have been a son to me, our Clarice will be very happy. But you have known him, dear, for long, and,” with a quivering smile lighting up her sweet face, “I need not descant upon his merits. Great as they are in his mother’s eyes, naturally, I could not have wished him a worthier or lovelier wife, my darling child.”

While thus they are talking with full hearts in this new-found happiness, Lord Amat enters.

Usually somewhat formal and precise, a disciplinarian, as many sailors are even on shore, but most kind, there is something startling in his hurried gait and excited manner as he approaches them; not the less so, that he, notwithstanding his own preoccupation, catching

from the attitudes of the group a glimpse of the possible relations now existing between them, feels the difficulties of the task before him harder than he had anticipated.

But with an effort he pulls himself together, and after a few words of affectionate greeting, says, "Charlie, my boy, there are some unpleasant-looking official letters for you in the hall. I hope they don't mean a curtailment of your leave; shall I fetch them for you?"

"Oh, no, Lairdie; I can no longer pretend to be an invalid, as dear Mum will tell you," says Charlie, with a conscious laugh, grasping his father by the hand; "but before we go—for I will carry off Clarice with me, if I may—I must present my promised wife to you. Will you not love her as a daughter?"

"So! yes, indeed, my dear," taking her in his arms; "I will for your own sweet sake, as well as for his, and that of my best and oldest friends—who I hope will know how gladly you are so welcomed. Take her to them, Charlie, and say

you have already got our blessing ; I don't think they will deny her to you."

Happy as is the mother, the wifely instinct has penetrated all the well-sustained effort, and, when they are at last alone, Lady Amat, putting her hand on his arm, says piteously :

"What trouble has come upon us, Lewis mine ?"

For answer he could only take her to his heart at first, and try to stem the current of her too accurate forebodings.

"I know not, love ; at least I cannot say. The news from India are not good, and I fear more troops will have to go."

"Ah ! how sad for those whose kin are among them. Are there any that we know, dear ?"

"Yes, my darling, many." (How can I tell her ?)

"Who ? Any that we care for much ?"

"There are indeed." (This is torture !)

"What ! ah, God !—tell me, it is not our boy !"—clutching at him convulsively ; and as the terrible truth dawns upon her, less from his

words than the tone of his voice, the expression of his face, she seems to slip from his grasp, and sinks to the floor a shattered wreck of the bright, beautiful, happy mother she was a few short moments before.

Once more, ere the sun had set again, the Castle is steeped in sorrowful anxiety, and each one counts the minutes as they speed, while the beloved *châtelaine* lies unconscious, waiting for the aid so happily at hand through her own kind and hospitable nature.

At last it comes, though meanwhile poor Charlie and his father find it hard to bear the agonizing suspense, so trying to those who watch the beloved suffer, unable to relieve or do anything but offer spasmodic prayer.

The practised eye and ready knowledge of the doctor soon see what has worked the ruin.

“Paralysis, my Lord ; but do not be alarmed. I do not think there need be apprehension of more than possibly severe prostration and it may be a temporary, partial loss of power. Her ladyship’s constitution I take to be sound, and,

with the careful, constant nursing she will have, her recovery is, under God, only a question of time. But tell me, what gave her such a shock as this?"

"Ah! and he must go, of course. This is indeed grave. How are we to guard against a recurrence of the blow? I should warn you frankly that a second stroke, coming quickly, might be fatal."

"I'm sure I cannot tell. He must rejoin before the regiment sails. If he goes while she is still unconscious his absence may provoke another shock, while even if he could remain here the sight of him might recall the mental agony from which she is now suffering."

"What orders have been received then, my Lord?"

"They are directed to join within forty-eight hours. It takes half of that to get to Portsmouth from this, so they must leave to-morrow evening at latest."

"Well, let us hope for the best. I have seen one night of perfect rest and quiet work wonders.

You may ensure these here, I think. Lady Amat must be tended with the greatest watchfulness, and in the morning we may be better able to shape our course."

It is sad indeed for the just adopted daughter to see one whom she had loved always, but how much more now that the tie between them is acknowledged, thus prostrated by the news which has come upon her own newly-found happiness with such cruel swiftness.

But one grief helps to drive away another, and as she sits and watches by her Charlie's mother, the sorrow at his sudden departure is deadened by the deep anxiety she feels for the result of this alarming illness.

Poor Clarice is no Stoic. She has loved Charlie more or less all her life, and has hardly yet tasted the joy of knowing she is beloved in turn. But she is a soldier's daughter, and, brought up in a school where duty takes the first place, she is ready to part with him at its call, trusting, as she has not in vain before, that it may still be well with him in the dangers

which she cannot ignore, though she tries to comfort herself by thinking they will not be so great as those he has recently passed safely through.

As for Eila, Julia, Olive, it would be difficult to say with what feelings they hear the cause of Lady Amat's seizure.

Eila feels she cannot measure by any ordinary rule such a man as Ronald Elliot. She has not seen enough, and yet perhaps too much, of him to be able to form an unbiassed opinion of the qualities without which she thinks she is not one to give away her heart entirely. Still, as she looks back from the beginning of their acquaintance, and the rapidity with which they have advanced to a more intimate interchange of deeper thoughts and feelings, she cannot help admitting to herself that no one she has ever met before possessed that indefinable charm which pervades the man of a woman's inmost preference. And yet she has seen not a few.

Olive's more impulsive heart, uncontrolled by any worldly necessity, has ere this gone out of

her own safe keeping, and it is with a tearful expression, a somewhat tremulous lip, that she says, "Good night" for the last time—may it be for ever?—to the handsome, chivalrous-hearted Fergus, who has realized her day-dream of all that is desirable in a husband.

Julia, "so light and so careless," as a devoted Coldstream used to call her, is, to say the least of it, sorry that Ian is going; but if it were not that the fact means Charlie's departure also, she would, as her habit is, easily console herself; comforted moreover by the satisfactory feeling that, for once at all events, she would be able to combine pleasure with duty.

As for Lady Alice, she recognizes once more the vanity of worldly schemes, and again the kindly nature, which lies down below the crust engrained upon it by the hard knocks and struggles of her daily life, asserts itself, and she becomes at once the comfort and mainstay of the stricken husband and household.

CHAPTER X.

“When the angry trumpet sounds alarm, and dead men’s cries do fill the empty air.”—*Warwick*.

To the young soldiers themselves the order is neither unexpected nor unwelcome. They would naturally prefer service against a worthier foe ; but the duties of the modern legionary lie in all parts of the known world, and if he is to gather laurels he cannot say at whose cost they may be won.

As they assemble in the smoking-room for what they know must be the last time for many a long day, if not for that infinite span which man’s imagination vainly endeavours to grasp, the thoughts of all are naturally full of the events of the day.

“They must have made up their minds to send us in a great hurry,” says Ronald, blowing a cloud as he throws himself back in the easiest of chairs; “it was only the other day we gave a lot of volunteers.”

“Yes, Paul, and Hugh Baillic writes that we are already threatened with an irruption of fine fellows whose Irish brogue and Cockney chaff would hardly fit the kilt.”

“Trust to the chief to make that right,” says Ian. “If there’s one thing he’s keener about than another it is the absurdity of having men of one country dressed in the garb of another. That’s why he never would allow the undeniable good qualities of the Zouave, though I agree with him so far that they are much overrated in some respects. Discipline they don’t know as we read the word; and though undoubtedly hard hitters, I don’t think they would stand a heavy pounding from a determined enemy.”

“For that,” says Fergus, “give me the much-abused Turk. I’ll back him to stand more neglect, and fight better at the end of it, than any

soldier in the world. Feed him, arm him, lead him as we could, and there is nothing possible to man he would not do."

"It is as well, perhaps, for their neighbours, then," remarks the General, "that their pachas and officers generally are so effete."

"Possibly, sir; for with all his undeniable good qualities as a soldier, our late enemy the Russian owes but little to the care of his officers. He marches for ever and fights till he drops or is ordered to the rear, and as for pain he certainly bears it better than any fellow I ever came across. After the heavy cavalry charge at Balaclava we advanced over the same ground, and while we were halted for a few minutes I saw one of the enemy lying on his back with his head split almost in two. Seeing his eyes open, I poured a little brandy down his throat, thinking to drown his terrible pain. Fancy my astonishment when he rose to his feet, and, clasping his hands tight over his head, he staggered away to the rear!"

"He must have been a toughish fellow that;

but after what happened to me to-day in the forest my old ideas of the vulnerable parts of any animal are quite upset," says Ian.

"Ah! what became of you? If we had not known you were very capable of taking care of yourself we might have thought you had come to grief when you did not turn up by a decent hour."

"I found everything in Corrie Voe worth going for was at the east end, and that means some six miles of toughish walking. So the day was getting on before I settled to my work; and then there were so many stags, big and little, that I began to despair of having a fair chance of a good head. At last I spied a 'royal' that was well worth having, and, after a long stalk, I got a crack at him. I suppose I am out of gear; anyhow my ball went high, just over his shoulder, and I had to give him another as he was moving off. Over he went, and I was beginning to load when I saw him stagger on to his feet. As Donald was gone towards Loch Corr to see what had made the deer move somewhat

suspiciously early in the day, I had no one with me, so I ran up to his side as he tottered down the hill. Presently his legs went faster, and I had to double to keep up with him. I dared not stop to load; so there we were running a veritable race for life, in which every minute he appeared to get stronger, while my powers of keeping up with him became weaker. I don't know how long this went on; but at last, when it seemed as if I must give it up, he stopped short, reeled, and fell dead. When I galloped him I found the ball had gone clean through the lower part of the heart!

"I had fairly lost Donald, so all I could do was to tie a white handkerchief to my rod, shove it into the heather, and smoke till he might find me with his glass, which at last he did; but it was nearly ten before I got in here."

"It was well, Macdonald, that it was only a stag you had to deal with," says Trevor. "When I was in India for a short time I shot a good deal of big game, and met with more than one warning of the danger of taking for granted

that the beast was dead. As you will all be there probably some little time, perhaps it won't bore you young fellows if I tell you my first adventure with a tiger. It has its moral, or I wouldn't inflict you with it."

"Do by all means, Colonel. Ever since I read the 'Tale of a Tub,' and how a chap was carried off by a tiger, which he shot as he went along on his back, I have longed to find myself in the jungles."

"Well, it's a bit of a yarn, so you had better light a fresh weed, though I fear we shall not see our host or Charlie here to-night.

"It was not long after I had landed in India that I found myself marching through a district in Rohileund. 'Twas during the cold weather, about the middle of January, and, rather bored with camp life, I used always to go out, as soon as I could after the tents were pitched, with my shikari on a pad elephant, which carried my small battery—a double-barrelled Purdey and a Joe Manton, also excellent in throwing a ball up to eighty yards. In fact, for close work in

a jungle give me a smooth-bore rather than a rifle. It is handier for a quick snap shot, and, as you know, in comparing the wounds, it seems to strike with more stunning effect.

“At that time of year the jungle is green, the country full of water, and one does not look for tigers until the heat begins to dry up the grass and the pools; but I was always keenly hoping to come across one, and rather stupidly said one night at mess I wished I might kill my first single-handed, at which I was chaffed a good deal, being only a cornet.

“However, one day I went out as usual, and had not gone far when I wounded a magnificent cheetul—a spotted deer, very much like our fallow, except that his horns are not palmated. Seeing he was hard hit I slipped off the elephant and told the shikari to follow me. After tracking him for some time I thought I heard it moaning not far off, so pushing through some high jungle I found myself in a sort of glade about fifteen yards long; but at the other end of it, instead of the cheetul, was a splendid tiger!

“I can see him now as he stood in a gleam of sunshine, his head towards me and his tail lashing his sides, as he emitted the muttering sound I had so mistaken.

“Instinct made me at once bring my rifle to the present, and, sighting him behind the shoulder, I was just going to pull when I saw that in my hurry to follow the deer I had not loaded the right barrel, which I had fired at it.

“I knew enough of the tenacity of life in the feline tribe to be aware it was madness even at that distance to trust to one barrel. So keeping my eye fixed firmly on the tiger's, and bringing the rifle down as quietly as I could, I put my hand gently behind me for the Joe Manton which the shikari carried. In vain I moved my hand from side to side!—I dared not speak or even whisper. But at last it dawned upon me that the gallant native had not cared to remain in such a neighbourhood! What was I to do?

“Again I brought the rifle up, and pressing my finger steadily on the trigger, in another half second the fate of one of us would probably have

been sealed, when I remembered that my rifle had a standing sight for one hundred yards, and that I had more than once found it throw too high for immediate results at near shots. This decided me ; but how was I to get out of his presence ? All the time the magnificent brute kept his eye on me, and I felt that if I turned my back to him he would be upon it in a bound.

“ At last, in a state bordering on fascination, I moved one foot slowly to the rear, then the other, and thus inch by inch retreated, as from royalty, until I found myself close to a fairly big tree. There I was safe ; and hurrying off to where I had left the elephant, I found the shikari and mahout in affected fears of my safety.

“ Seizing the Joe Manton, with anything but a blessing, I hastened back to the glade, thinking I should arrive at a more satisfactory conclusion this time. But he too had thought discretion the better part, and was gone.

“ Of course when I got back to camp and told the story against myself I was unmercifully

roasted ; but from all I saw afterwards I think the chances were too much against me."

"I don't think, Trevor, you would have been here to tell the tale if you had fired," says the General. "I remember when I was out there hearing of two fine young fellows coming to an untimely end from over-confidence. They were 'griffens,' as they used to be called in those days—why I never could make out—and were marching up country to join their regiment, when the head man of a village near their camp came and implored them to kill a man-eating tiger who was the terror of the country round about.

"Of course they were only too pleased, and turned in that night thinking of the sport they were to have in the morning, poor boys.

"As soon as the daylight broke they were off, escorted by the villagers, who came to see the death of their terrible enemy.

"They were not long in finding the brute, who broke cover and charged down upon them at once. They were on foot—they had never seen a tiger in their lives, except in a menagerie—

but they waited for him, and as he came on they gave him all four balls in his chest. Still he closed on them, as they stood, brave fellows, shoulder to shoulder, without a thought of turning, and in his death-spring he fell on both the poor lads.

“When the natives summoned courage enough to approach, they found all three dead!”

“A game lot the trio must have been,” was Ian’s remark as he took a pull at his whisky-and-seltzer to wash down something in his throat. “All our sport from fox-hunting, deer-stalking, and salmon-fishing downwards, is very good in its way; but with the exception of a small spice of risk in the first, minimized by a good horse and knowledge of country to the hardest men,—who, by the way, come least often to serious grief,—it is altogether too one-sided to be anything like what our ancestors used to call ‘the mimic war’.”

“You will have some of the real thing before long,” says Trevor; “and, after that is over, when you have had a turn in the Terai and

Thibet, you will wonder how so many are content to pay large sums to slay deer and grouse at home, when for a smaller outlay they might see a new world, and taste the invigorating delights of mortal danger. Until then no man can be said to have lived."

"I agree with you, Colonel," says Ronald. "From my earliest days I meant to carry a sword, like all my folks before me, but I often wondered how I would face the whistle of a bullet. When it came I confess I was surprised. The first time one sits at the covert side in all the swagger of one's own mount and new red kit can never be forgotten. The first waltz with one's affinity is a thing of itself. But of all the thrilling first experiences there is none that can compare with one's *baptême de feu*. At least most think so, I fancy."

"Not a doubt of it. Every man is the better for being shot at, and few can go through a campaign without thoughts which better them in after life. Our neighbours make a vast mistake in assuming it to be necessary to

prove a man's courage. My experience is that there are few cowards, except under physical disability."

"Ah! more than one hero has suffered temporarily from doubts as to his love of the 'villainous saltpetre,'" says the General, lighting his candle as he rises to turn in. "But there are other dangers in India. Let me give you a parting bit of advice. It's borrowed, I confess, from Sam Weller's father, 'Beware of the widows' — I mean the grass ones — in the Hills."

"I fear," adds Trevor, as they all follow his example, "I can give you only what may be a more prosaic but not less necessary caution. Shoot tigers or snipe in the hottest weather rather than drift into drinking brandy-and-water and playing unlimited loo all day. You may get a sun-stroke or your liver cooked, but you will never be so wrecked physically and morally as by gambling. If you win you may be the ruin of some poor wretch, whose father, mother, sisters, wife, children, must go into the

gulf also ; while if you lose you may find the sunshine of your life gone irretrievably. Try, my dear fellows, to lead a high life, not a fast one. All hillmen will tell you that it is not so very much harder to climb than to descend, if you set your mind to it—‘A stout heart to a stae brae.’ In a word, ‘think high, live low,’ and you will be always fit for duty, whatever happens.”

CHAPTER XI.

“By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes.”—*2nd Witch.*

THE next morning breaks on an anxious and sorrowful house. The Doctor is the first to enter the sick-room. To his delight, but not altogether to his astonishment, he finds Lady Amat sensible and calm.

“Ah ! Doctor, I am afraid to think how I gave way yesterday. But truly the shock was very sudden. It seems as if the anxieties we suffered during the Crimea were hardly over. Only two days ago our boy was all but drowned before my eyes. He was given back to us by a merciful Providence ; he had just added to my supreme happiness by giving me a daughter, than whom

no better could I have chosen to be his wife,— you have heard? — and it is dashed to the ground by this terrible order.”

“Pray, Lady Amat, don’t dwell on this subject just now. I know how painful it must be to you. In some way, possibly, the separation you dread may be averted.”

“Impossible, Doctor. Though the last of his House, he must go. Upon none of his Race has malice been able to throw an aspersion. I have seen what ruin to a man’s fair fame and happiness the misdirected love of a mother or a wife has worked. You wonder at my strength of mind to-day? I am not surprised. Do you believe in visions?”

“There are too many well-authenticated cases of such things for me to doubt the fact,” replies the Doctor cautiously, as he scans closely the excited face of his patient. “I myself have experienced that which cannot be explained by any knowledge we have at present.”

“Well, then,” says Lady Amat, sinking back on the pillow, while a look of satisfaction steals

over her worn face, "you will perhaps understand and sympathize with what I am now going to tell you.

"Towards morning I suddenly recovered the consciousness I appear to have lost when my dear husband broke the news of our son's approaching departure. Instantly there came over me that sense of there being some other presence in the room, which I cannot explain."

"I understand," interjects the Doctor, now all attention, for this promises to bear on what is rather a hobby of his.

"At first, dazed with weakness, and willing, if I could, to ignore what might be, to my already fevered imagination, portentous of further sorrow, I made no effort to analyze what this was. But gradually the mists, as it were, rolled away, and I saw what has, you may think strangely, given me such comfort and strength as to enable me to seem to you just now, what I ought in truth to be, if descent goes for anything—a very Spartan mother.

"A tall veiled figure approached the foot of the

bed there, and seeing my attention was fixed, pointed with intense significance towards that arras, which conceals the door to the turret.

“As I looked, the tapestry seemed to fade away, and I saw my boy’s regiment going into action. In the distance were strange features of landscape which I recognized as typical of an Eastern country. Presently I saw one of his men dart forward in front of him, and then fall back as if dead. Lifting in his arms the man who thus seemed to have shielded his life, my son showed me the face of his foster-brother Duncan, whose father, Hamish Grant, saved him but two days ago from drowning.

“The scene changed, and I saw Charlie attacked by several men, clothed in white with green turbans, whom he was keeping at bay with his own single sword. At his feet lay others, and one or two of his soldiers. Suddenly a sergeant in his regiment appeared to come to his rescue and slew two; but, alas! a third seemed by one stroke of his curved sword to sweep the sergeant’s head from his shoulders! In the ghastly face, as

it rolled at his feet, I recognized Evan, the eldest son of Hamish, who joined with Charlie when he got his commission.

“Horror-stricken, yet fascinated, I still gazed.

“Once more the tapestry was imbued with life ; but this time it was the dear old castle which first met my eye.

“Looking along the terrace I saw a man, swarthy and bearded, walking with my Clarice ; as they came towards me his manner seemed strangely tender to one who had promised to be my son’s wife, while hers to him was no less painful to me. At last their lingering steps brought them near enough for me to recognize in him at last my boy ; and with a cry of exceeding joy I called out, ‘My son ! my son !’

“Clarice was by my bedside in a moment, rejoicing in my return to consciousness, and soothed me so with her cool hand and gentle voice that I quickly fell into a deep quiet sleep, from which I have but a short time awakened.”

“You have told this to no one else, Lady Amat ?”

“No ; I waited until I had seen you ; besides, I have hardly had time or opportunity since I awoke.”

“Did Lord Amat tell you what Hamish Grant did and said the night before last, when we returned from the yacht ?”

“No. What happened ?”

“We were all in the hall, when I saw Hamish standing on the terrace, and I attracted Lord Amat’s attention to him. Coming in when he was called, he crossed over, kissed your husband’s hand, and saying a few words in Gaelic; hurriedly left the castle. In interpreting this, Lord Amat conveyed the impression that Hamish had saved his life in days gone by, and that a man gifted with second sight predicted the death of his son for yours. This dream or vision of yours is certainly startling in its apparent confirmation.”

“Oh, Doctor, it does seem heartless, selfish, superstitious to a degree, to take comfort through such means and sources ; but I cannot tell you how firmly I believe that Charlie will return to us as I have told you.”

“There are many things that men do not understand now ; perhaps never may in this world,” gravely says the Doctor, who is more impressed by his patient’s tale than he cares to admit, even to himself. “Far be it from me to throw doubt on your belief, or the comfort you derive from it. On the contrary, I have myself experienced that which goes far to confirm your own impression ; but I cannot, as a practical man of the world, say to you, ‘Rely upon such things ;’ and my professional position bids me warn you against placing credence in what may prove a cruel deception after all, Lady Amat.”

Stretching out her poor wan hand, she says, “What a comfort it has been to me to be able to speak to you thus ! Something whispered to me at once that you would sympathize with me. I could not have told my husband, still less Charlie. You will mention it to no one ?”

“Not to a soul, Lady Amat. And now that your mind is calmer, let me see what we can do towards building up your strength again.”

It may be imagined with what relief Lord Amat finds his wife so much more tranquil and resigned than he had dared to hope.

Turning to the Doctor as they go down-stairs, he says, "You are indeed a physician beyond all guerdon ; but if thanks for a life, priceless as you may imagine this dear one is to me, can take a sufficiently tangible shape, you have but to tell me."

"Ah, my Lord," says the Doctor, not unused to rapturous gratitude at the moment of relief, to be followed by unpaid indifference as the feeling fades, but giving his Celtic host full and deserved credit for his emotional thanks, "I told you last night that rest and quiet might work wonders—as indeed they have. You must give more *kudos* to nature, and less to me. I am very happy to find how well able Lady Amat is to look facts as they are in the face. She has already told me she is quite resigned to her son's immediate departure."

"You are a magician, sir!" says the astonished husband, wringing his hand for a moment as he

stops and looks at the calm, unemotional, kind-hearted, but necessarily secretive, medico. "It was indeed a merciful thing you were here."

"For that, my Lord," he replies, bowing solemnly, "thank God and your own hospitality, which prompted you to keep me as a guest when my services, such as they are, were unneeded."

"Ah, Doctor, we do not know how often we entertain angels unawares."

CHAPTER XII.

“You shall be more loving than beloved.”

Soothsayer, Antony and Cleopatra.

THE feelings with which they meet at breakfast are strangely mixed. We all complain at times of the *convenances*, when the shoe pinches our particular sin or whim of the moment, forgetting, perhaps, that without them the machinery of society would come to a standstill—or be destroyed from want of the necessary lubrication. Now, thanks to long-imposed habit, each conceals, with more or less success, from the others the emotions which are more deeply stirred than they confess to themselves, as they think of all that lays against their ever so meeting again.

It is a relief when they adjourn to the terrace,

and, grouping themselves perhaps in greater consonance than had been possible at breakfast, are able to look and speak more freely to each other the thoughts of which their hearts are full.

Clarice, pale and worn with her night of anxious watching, never looked more lovely in Charlie's eyes than when they walked together to the farther end, and sat gazing, in that silence which is so eloquent, across the deep blue waters to the distant western hills.

How often in the days to come will she not sit and think, until, by the very intensity of her longing, she brings him back in all but bodily presence ?

Will he, can he, in the time that lies before them, ever forget the long-loved one and the simple, earnest words which seal their troth ?

But now, in the living present, as they look into each other's eyes, and study every lineament as if they would fain imprint them on the loving, quivering heart which rebels against the agony it silently endures, they gradually imbibe that anodyne which happily comes to many in

the hours of trial, to deaden what would otherwise be insupportable.

The old clock on the middle tower has rung out more than one chime ere a word has crossed their lips, and yet what volumes of meaning have been conveyed by the tender hand-clasp, the humid, love-filled eyes ?

At last he speaks. Does she recognize in the hoarse, constrained accents the usually liquid, tender voice of her beloved ? “It is hard to leave you in this way, my Clarice. For your sake, darling, I could almost wish I had not fettered you ; and yet, selfish as men ever are, it would have been harder still to have left you uncertain whether your love was mine or not.”

“Charlie, dear !” she says, turning to him with her face pale and sad but for the love-light in her eyes and a faint blush, as of the earliest summer rose, rising with the thoughts her words call forth ; “you don’t know a true, loving, woman’s heart if you think that I would not rather thus have the right to share at least your thoughts. I may now tell you how terrible

it was, after I found you were so dear to me, to have to conceal my thoughts, and feel that after all I might be no more to you than, if so much as, a dear cousin ! ”

For answer he clasps her to his heart, fiercely, passionately, almost to her hurt, as if he would defy all power to take her from him ; and then, recognizing his impotency, his thoughts fly away to the time, so quickly striding upon them, when there will be nothing but a memory—a thing impalpable, daily growing weaker, paler—and he pleads against it. “ You will wait for me, Clarice ? God alone knows how or when I may return. May you not be tempted to think of another, far more worthy of you in every way, in the possibly long, weary separation which may be in store for you ? ”

She nestles in his arms ; her eyes, her lips meet his, and then she says in a low, firm, clear voice, whose bell-like tones echo again and again in his lonely heart during the night-watches of the future :

“ I have loved you, Charlie, and none other,

not even for a passing moment, all my life. Think you I will not wait? I am yours now, yours only, and for ever. Can I say more?"

Is he satisfied?—as once more he drinks in every detail of her pure and loving face, ere he answers: "No, my own, I do not doubt your strength and faith; it is my own unworthiness; but come weal, come woe, I will trust you with my happiness until you give it back to me."

"That will never be, Charlie, for it is mine too now, and I cannot part with it," says Clarice, passionately, while there comes to her a feeling of perfect security and safety. Her head sinks again on his shoulder, and a look which he never forgets steals into her eyes as he bends down to seal on her lips the plighted love of all their young lives.

Fergus finds little difficulty in persuading Olive to follow the example Charlie had set; and, as they wander through the birch woods below the Castle, he pours out his tale of manly love to the not unwilling ear of the susceptible

girl, whose heart has already gone out of her safe keeping.

As they walk together she knows, yet shrinks from, what he is going to say. Her head is averted, yet her ear is eager to catch the first notes of the love-song by the voice she has learned to listen to with such strange pleasure. Her colour comes and goes, and her heart beats loudly as she steals a quickly withdrawn glance at the firm, handsome face, the tall, soldier-like figure, to which her own dark beauty and slender form are such a complement.

What makes Fergus, who does not know what physical fear can mean, prolong the silence in which they pace side by side, while a crowd of memories jostle each other in the confused state of mind to which he is so unused? Will she have to hustle him over his first fence, as did the sporting young lady whose bashful admirer remained speechless till she gave him a lead?

"Olive," at last he says, suddenly stopping and taking both her hands with a somewhat nervous manner, which does not diminish his

charm for her, "I fear it is a very selfish thing to do ; a man placed as I am now should not, perhaps, ask a girl like you to say if she loves him well enough to wait to be his wife, until his return, God knows when, from where he is going ; but I cannot help it, I must tell you how inexpressibly dear and lovable you have become to me. It is impossible for me to leave you without knowing if you care enough to give me the promise of all I want so passionately. Will you, darling—my dearest?" and his voice sinks into the softest music, as, emboldened by her silence, his words pass from the commonplace into the region of most fervid love.

For answer all that Olive gives is contained in a dark, loving, lustrous eye, charged to the brim with a tearful yet most tender gladness, which electrifies the inexperienced Fergus as it turns full upon his agitated and expectant face.

The next instant he is kissing the upturned lips with all the passion of a love ardent and enduring as is that of the man who, full of

romance and self-respect, has kept it waiting in its purity for the woman who fulfils his ideal.

“Alas! my Olive, that we should find this out so late!” murmurs the lover, who a few moments before professed to be content to wait, it might be for years, for the opportunity he seizes now with both hands, and yet asks for more!

“Monsieur!” exclaims the blushing girl, “it seems to me it could not well have been much sooner! What would you? You ask for an inch, and incontinently take nearly two ells,” as she glances down her tall, budding, beautiful figure which he has so rapturously clasped in his arms.

“I fear you must wait until your return covered with further decorations, and the right to convert your claymore into whatever may be the equivalent of a ploughshare in those dear hills of yours,” looking across Loch Eil towards Benquoich. But she grows pale as the womanly, loving heart, overcoming the natural shyness of the moment, recognizes the dangers he must go through, the weary, anxious time of separation

ere this love-dream may even hope to be realized. “You will not be over-daring? You will think what it must be for me to know you are exposed to many and great dangers. I have heard of you, how you seemed to bear a charmed life; but remember, please, sometimes, that it is not now altogether your own;” and as she speaks she lays her hand upon his arm in a tender, caressing way, which tells Fergus more even than her words and looks that he has indeed won her heart.

Fergus is intoxicated with the sudden draught of happiness presented to his lips, the completeness of the victory in the first attempt he has made to win the heart of a woman, though from his earliest days he has been devoted to the sex. Yet he does not lose his head, as winding his arm round her he presses her yielding, clinging, shapely figure in a long, lingering, passionate embrace, ere he says:

“As far as a soldier may, my beloved, I will guard what is yours now. Please God, the bullet is not cast, nor the sword forged, that

will come between you and me. Give me a little bit of that curl I have so often madly longed to touch ; it shall rest on my heart till I come home to claim you for my own, and may prove a better charm against evil than many a so-called relic. My old nurse Elspeth foretold that I would marry a dark-eyed witch, whose name was of the sunny south."

"We must be going, Fergus ; my mother must know this before you leave ; and then, what remains for us who are left behind but to weep and pray ?" For a moment she verges on the borderland of hysterics ; her highly sensitive, over-wrought nerves are strung to the utmost tension ; and, as her eyes wander over her newly-acquired betrothed, she wonders at her own strength and the calmness with which at last she resolutely tramples down her threatening weakness, and adds, "Come !"—but as they go back to the Castle it seems to both that everything is changed, for the glamour of their newborn joy is thrown over even the most prosaic of the surroundings.

Poor Ronald, hard hit as he is, can say nothing to the girl who has tied him to her chariot-wheels ; he can only wait and hope that the day may yet come when he may find himself free to go to her, and declare his love.

Still, as they stroll to and fro, and see the outward and visible signs of happy understanding on either side, it is impossible for him to repress a sigh.

“ Captain Elliot is somewhat *triste* this morning,” says the coquettish Eila, as they lean over the western parapet, and she flirts her fan with all the languid grace of a daughter of Spain.

“ It is not easy, Miss Trevor, for one who is a waif and a stray on life’s great ocean, to feel himself drifting out of a haven of such happiness as this has been to me without the coming of thoughts which may well call up regrets, useless, it’s true, but not the less saddening.”

Softened at once by his striking a note which is echoed with such sympathy in her own heart, she says, with a *timbre* of tenderness in her voice which thrills through him again and again, “ I did

not think, or I would not have been so thoughtless. Forgive me; I am too used to making light of the gravest occasions, and it did not strike me that you are one to take life otherwise than as it comes, with much equanimity."

Ronald's eyes flash a response to her tone which she accepts without analyzing; but it seems to her very sweet, though as the words follow there seems to be a subtle change in everything which makes life so much less worth living for than it was but a few seconds before. "It would have been a very true estimate only a short time ago, but you know how quickly circumstances alter cases, and I confess I do not recognize myself this morning as the same who came here so lately; who the alchemist has been, time, which trieth truth, alone will show. I dare not, cannot say more now, but if I am spared to see you again, when less tongue-tied by cruel Fate, may I hope to find you have not forgotten one who has been only too happy here?"

"If my best wishes and sincere sympathy for

all you may desire can avail they are most gladly yours," says Eila, softly; as her eyes assume a far-away look, from which Ronald, with all his experience in tender passages, can gather nothing but a sentiment which may mean little, it would be dangerous or foolish to reckon on as much.

"In a little while I must bid you farewell, formally; forgive me if I tear myself away now. I cannot stay without saying more than I ought," cries Ronald, suddenly; and taking her hand, which now hangs listlessly by her side, he imprints one hasty, impassioned kiss upon its soft, smooth skin, and hurries away, without venturing to look into the eyes he has learned to know are very hard to resist.

Eros seems rampant in the precincts of the Castle this morning. In another part of the grounds is yet a fourth couple who appear to take an interest in each other.

"It strikes me," says Ian to Julia, as they saunter up and down, "that our friends are pairing in a manner which is very suggestive. Poor Charlie! I know he has been hopelessly

gone in that quarter ever since I can remember. As for Paul, it is his normal condition; but Fergus! when men of his stamp go in for that kind of thing it is a very serious matter. I would give a good deal to know how he approaches the subject; a proposal an hour or two before a fellow goes, on active service, to the other side of the world must be rather nervous work, don't you think?"

Julia shrugs her shoulders with the significance of a Frenchwoman: "That would depend a good deal on the amount of experience on both sides. If a man were very much in earnest, I fancy it would not be difficult to convey that impression to a sympathetic listener; and yet people make strange mistakes at times. A great friend of mine refused a man she was devoted to because, while he was struggling through the agony of a proposal, he yawned. She found out afterwards, quite by accident, from the wife to whom he transferred his injured affections, that he always did gape whenever he heard a donkey bray."

“Poor man ! Forgive me if I reflect on your friend by saying that he evidently narrowly escaped yawning for the rest of his life.”

“You are severe.”

“Perhaps ; but I think you must agree with me that many people rush into the state which may mean as much unmitigated misery as unalloyed happiness (I don’t believe in either extreme myself), without gauging the character upon the nature of which depends their future joy or sorrow. Were it possible, I would suggest tentative arrangements. I am certain that if people knew they were on their trial much of the unhappiness of the first few months of married life would not exist. And then the habits of self-control, and the desire to please the other, would have become so strong that the definite settlement of the contract would follow in the majority of cases.”

“Novel ! to say the least of it ; but how would you deal with the minority ? There would be some difficulty, it seems to me, in reverting to the *status ante quo*.”

“Yes! There lies the stumbling-block. Were it not for that, which perhaps might be got over by mutual concessions, my theory would have so many disciples in practice that there would soon be left only such misogynists as myself.”

As Ian's looks and manner are not quite in keeping with that profession of faith, the fair Julia, whose experience is not limited, finds some food for thought while they sit down and watch the fleeting glories of the brilliant autumn day, which sinks deeper into their memories than either would admit to be possible.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog, and spit upon my Jewish gabardine.”—*Shylock*.

It had been Lord Amat's first impulse to go down and see his son off, but the alarmingly sudden illness of his wife made him abandon the idea. So the last farewells are spoken in the Castle, which has witnessed within and around its walls so much that goes to make up the sum of human grief.

Then they are gone ! And those who are left have but to bear, with such fortitude as they can summon, the harder part which falls to the lot of those who wait for tidings from the actors in the great drama of life.

Heartwrung as they well may be, the young

soldiers would not be worthy of the name did they not speedily shake off the natural gloom which accompanied them at first. But soon their usual buoyancy of spirits is restored by the physical fact of motion, and the exciting prospect of active service.

Thus while those left behind are still plunged deep in sorrow and care, which the circumstances attending the sudden disruption of the happy party have created, the four, who have been so lately the life and soul of it, are joining their regiment so apparently free from anything like unhappiness that their depth of feeling might well be misjudged.

How they are welcomed can only be known by those who have experienced the ties which bind so closely men who have faced together death and privation, shared purse and pleasure, with as little thought of self as is compatible with weak human nature.

As they rush into the ante-room, after their twenty-four hours of continuous travelling, they are greeted with joyful shouts.

“Glad to see you back, gentlemen,” says the Colonel, an excellent fellow off duty and out of barracks, but of the quarter-deck school, who think that there are few commanding officers who can afford to sink their position when in “war-paint,” however much they may relax the reins under the genial freedom of the mess of a good regiment. “I knew you would be here to the moment, though the temptations you were exposed to were very strong, I hear! But Forbes there can never get over that message of Macpherson’s last winter from the wilds of Badenoch, when at the end of his leave a letter came from him saying that all communication was stopped by the snow, and therefore he could not join! One of the many proofs that we are not less Irish than our ancestors, eh, Lachlan?”

“Yes, Colonel, that was an unlucky shot of mine. It never struck me you would conclude from the arrival of the miserable document that I could have put in an appearance also. But I’ll be wiser another time!”

“Thanks, sir,” says Charlie, as he shakes hands

with the Chief. "We came away by the first mail we could manage after we got the order. My father told me to say how sorry he was not to come down and see the regiment before it sails, but my poor mother is very far from well, and he didn't like to leave her. So he begs the acceptance of a fifty-gallon cask of ten-year-old Islay, which he thinks may help to remind you all of him on the other side of the water. And he is going to send some grouse the moment the 'Twelfth' breaks legitimately."

"Very kind, I am sure, Grant. Good whisky is infinitely safer than brandy anywhere, though I don't advocate the use of either in a hot climate. As to the grouse, I doubt our eating them here, for the ships have arrived to take the rest of us. You know half the regiment sailed this morning! The head-quarters and flank companies go in the 'Emu,' a steamer of doubtful reputation I hear; and the 'Seagull,' a clipper, takes the remainder. We shall all be off before the week is out." So saying, the Colonel, who foresees that the younger ones are likely to keep it up, goes

off to his quarters with a genial "good night" to everyone, more especially, as was his kindly wont, to the unhappy sub. whose attempts on parade that morning to fill the place of one of the absent Captains had not been very successful.

Much as they like their Chief, there is a sense of relief when he departs, and they settle down to compare notes all round, and haver over the immediate past, present, and future.

"It's an ill wind that blows no one any luck," says Hugh Baillie, as they begin to discuss the grilled bones, poached eggs, and anchovy toast which he thinks the occasion warrants. "We got Huntly away in the 'Hotspur' out of the reach of his too attentive friends, the Jews. But it was a tight fit. How those fellows find out everything, the devil, or some needy clerk in the War Office, only knows. They got wind that his company, thanks to the Colonel's ready kindness, was transferred to the 'Hotspur' instead of waiting for the 'Seagull,' and one of them was heard declaring, by my old faithful, that he should never leave the country. It was

no use of course appealing to Shylock, hungry for his flesh, so we tried poor old 'Phil' for unofficer-like conduct in 'spending half-a-crown out of sixpence a day,' and sentenced him to be reduced to the rank and pay of a pioneer for twelve hours. Of course I went down with them to the dockyard, and could hardly contain myself as we went out at the gate here. For several yards there was a double row of 'bums' ready to pounce upon him. I don't know, by the way, if they can take a fellow out of the ranks. As the men went through the rascals, they poked their huge noses into their faces until I wondered the honest, debtless 'Jocks' didn't knock them down.

"However, they could see nothing of Phil, who, bearded like the Pard, and carrying a huge axe, was half way down the street as a pioneer in front of his own company—perfectly unrecognizable even by his mother. In their despair they came up to me, when they found themselves at the dockyard-gate still unsuccessful, and were not allowed to enter.

“ ‘That was Captain Huntly’s company?’ one fellow asked. ‘Certainly,’ I said. ‘Why did he not go with it?’ whines another. ‘Possibly,’ I answered, ‘they knew better than I; but I could give them a bit of information. He had been tried the day before for getting into debt, and his commission was taken from him!’ We did *pro tem*. Their howl of baffled rage reached the head of the column, as it turned on to the quay, and I could see old Phil in the distance forget his assumed position, and, to the intense horror of the Quartermaster-General, wave his axe triumphantly, high in the air!”

“Bravo, Hugo!—you are ever ready for a friend in need,” says Ian, who, with but little left of his ancestral acres, managed to enjoy life more than most fellows, and yet never owed a farthing.

“Yes, he is, by Jove! He has just got me out of a scrape with the ‘Beaks,’” says Frank Fletcher, who rejoices in the name of the “Weasel,” by reason of his small person and general aptitude for getting out of difficulties.

“How was that, boy?” asks Ian, with whom he is a great favourite.

“You know Rubenstein, of course?—the fellow who is always bothering us to buy marvellously cheap diamond rings which the Duchess of Blanqueland has commissioned him to sell at a great sacrifice to pay her losses at whist or *écarté*? Well, he came into my room the other morning just as I was getting out of my tub, without so much as saying, ‘by your leave!’ That riled me a bit, but I only shied my sponge in his face, and told him to wait outside till I was more clothed, and in my right mind.

“Presently he came in again, beastly civil. As the governor had paid all my debts last week, and I have a cool monkey to my credit at Cox’s, I thought I’d play my fish, who certainly has led more than one poor devil a dance in the last few weeks.

“He began: ‘Sorry you’re going, sir, in such a hurry. Must be very inconvenient; hardly had time to get in your arrears of rent. You had

better get rid of all this lumber,' pointing to my Lares, &c.

“ ‘Yes,’ I said ; ‘but who’s to buy ? There will not be a “soldier-officer” left in England soon at the rate they are packing us off, and a barrack-room kit is not likely to be much in demand by the successful grocer who grudges me the wretched five-and-threepence a day which helps to give him the tranquillity amidst which he sands his sugar. However, to business ! How much shall I say, Moses, for this splendid chest of drawers, brass-bound, Bramah locks, secrétaire and portable cases complete ? ’

“ ‘Couldn’t give you more than thirty shillings, sir ; quite a drug in the market, sir.’

“ ‘Told you so, Moses. What, then, for this magnificent camp-bedstead, mattress, valise and fittings complete ? ’

“ ‘It would be dear, sir, to me at one pound, sir. ’Pon my word, sir. Don’t be angry, sir. Couldn’t go no higher, sir.’

“To make a long story short, the rascal offered me a good deal under a tenner for the whole of

the kit I was going to leave behind. I took it so quietly that he thought he had done me, and pulling out a bundle of notes was offering me one, when I said, leaving the room, 'Before you pay for the lot you had better make sure you have got them,' and locked the door.

"My faithful, suspecting something was up, looked out of the kitchen as I went by, and in a few moments I had arranged my Caudine Forks.

"In the rookery, you know, we have a few pets of the fancy; and presently there was drawn up as nice a double line of ferocious bull-dogs as any timid man would like to walk between. Then I told MacGregor to open my door, and I went down to breakfast.

"In a few minutes there was an awful row, and we heard shrieks of terror mingled with cries for mercy, yells of laughter, and roars of 'Oh! de dawgs! de dawgs!' 'Guard, turn out!' 'Murder!' 'Fire!' All this was the unhappy Jew, who, assailed in rear by the fiery MacGregor armed with a mop and a pail full of water, fancied himself being torn to pieces by the dogs,

which I took care to chain up so as to leave him a clear run of twelve inches. However, I suppose he didn't measure his distance as accurately as Forbes would, and his lower garments suffered considerably, if his legs were not touched.

“At last he escaped. And in half-an-hour or so a *posse comitatus*, if not the high sheriff, armed with a writ of error, *habeas corpus*, or some other legal engine of war, demanded my miserable person.

“Hugo, of course, escorted me, and, equally of course, in a few of his dignified words of explanation he directed the offended majesty of the law to the wretched Jew, who found himself arrested on the spot, and will probably dream of me, or Front de Bœuf, for some time to come.”

“Well done! But take care, my ‘Weasel’; some day you’ll be caught to a moral. How is it though that you are here? Your company sailed in the ‘Hotspur.’”

“Exactly; but while you centurions were disporting yourselves on your native heaths

others had to do your work, so I was left behind, worse luck."

"Why so?"

"Because I shall have to go with the headquarters; and you know the old tradition, that our colours are never to land in India. Well, it runs a good chance of being fulfilled, for I hear the 'Emu,' to which they and we are to be entrusted, has such a bad character at a place called 'Lloyds' that she cannot be insured, and no decent sailor will go in her. *Voilà tout!* but you'll hear all about that in the morning. Your colour-sergeant, MacTavish, is quite resigned to a watery grave, and the men are so full of it that they are laying in large supplies of neat whisky, so that there may be no trouble in mixing their grog."

"Nonsense, boy. I suppose the Admiralty know what they are about. They don't pick up old colliers and send them down here as transports without overhauling them. And as for the sailors. Well, I have got a score of men from the Lews in the grenadiers alone who would

work most ships of the 'Emu's' class out of a difficulty."

"But there's the rub," says Baillie. "I believe that there has been such a demand for transports, and the urgency is so great, that the Admiralty have been obliged to shut their eyes to a good deal."

"Well," says Ian, stretching his seventy-four inches of toughish fibre, "I am not born to be drowned, if I know it. Let's sleep and think over all this the 'Weasel' has tried to cram us with."

CHAPTER XIV.

“Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground—I would fain die a dry death.”—*Gonzalo*.

It is little more than three years since the Red Highlanders sailed for Turkey. Yet what a change is there among them. More than half no longer answer to their names. Grant, Macdonald, Cameron, Elliot, then beardless ensigns, are now captains. But, as they parade in the hot August morning when the Queen comes over to bid them “God speed,” he would be one very hard to please who could find much fault with the appearance of the grave purposelike men who know they are going whence, in the ordinary chances of war and climate, but a small proportion can return as they are now setting

forth. He would be a yet worse judge of character if he mistook the absence of visible excitement or enthusiasm for anything like disinclination. The Scot always makes up his mind to die before going into action, and his religion does not cherish such pleasing fancies of the hereafter for the fallen warrior as that of the Mahomedan. Let those who have fought alongside him say whether they would prefer him to oe friend or foe.

And so they sail out of the historic harbour, with that strange mixture of apparent indifference affected by the veteran, and effervescent feeling ill-repressed by the younger soldier going abroad for the first time; but not before a huge box of grouse arrives from Amat, in time to be discussed with many a backward thought, as visions of the heathery hills they well may never see again rise up before them.

Ian has ascertained, by personal inquiry at Lloyd's agency, that the character of the 'Emu' and of her crew is not first-rate. He and Charlie, therefore, quietly divide the seafaring

men of their companies into watches, so that they are ready for an emergency if it should arise.

The morning of the eleventh day sees them with a ten-knot breeze bowling into St. Vincent at the Cape de Verde Islands.

To avoid the horrors of coaling, and to stretch their legs after such unaccustomed confinement, nearly every one but the unhappy fellows on duty rushes on shore to pursue the metallic-noted Guinea-fowl in his sandy haunts ; but as a rule the bags return emptier than on starting.

As they come off they are delighted by seeing one of the huge wooden steamers of the West India Mail line alongside, and yet more surprised when they find the band has gone on board in consequence of a touching appeal in Portuguese, which being interpreted, runs thus :

“ ENGLISH OFFICERS,

“ Some ladies from the Brazils on their way to Lisbon, hearing that you have music on board your ship, have prayed in your

absence that it might come and break the tedium of this long voyage. Should the fatigues of the chase leave you sufficient energy to follow it, the pleasures of the dance may reward you."

Nothing loth, they go. The spacious poop of the 'Tamar,' lit up with Chinese lanterns and screened with flags, makes a charming tropical ball-room; while a score or so of dark-eyed ladies of varied charms, arrayed in white muslin, beat time impatiently with their feet.

The good-natured captain acting as master of ceremonies, in a few minutes the scene becomes a lively one, for, though most have got their sea-legs well set, every now and then an exceptional roller comes in and sends them all down to leeward in laughing confusion.

At first it seems hard to see how acquaintance can ripen in the absence of a common language, but the eye speaks when the tongue fails to convey any meaning, and it is not long before there are evidences of rapid progress

between the warm-hearted daughters of South America and their newly-found friends.

Happily for the peace of the latter the laws of light on board ship are inexorable, and the first ball at St. Vincent comes to an end; but not before the "Weasel" is caught offering, in most emphatic pantomime, his audacious little heart to a fascinating brunette, whose husband has the awkward bad taste to resent his ignorance of her pre-occupied state. A judicious word or two from the captain puts this right; and it is with much display of handkerchief that the two ships steam away from each other next morning.

After this the voyage promises to be as monotonous as Dr. Johnson imagined life on board ship to be, when he described it as a term of imprisonment with the contingent capital punishment of death by drowning.

But one night, when south of the Cape, there comes a change. What the mutineers proposed to themselves never was ascertained. It must have been evident to them that the soldiers would not take their part against authority, and if they did

not they could by mere weight of numbers have hustled them overboard. This, however, did not prevent the crew refusing to go aloft one night when a heavy squall struck the ship as she was struggling in the famous rollers.

It was a very near thing, for the 'Emu' was a good deal out of the water, having consumed much of her coals, provisions, and water, and, not being stiff at the best of times, she was all but turning turtle as she got into the trough of the sea.

Happily Charlie was on deck, or the colours would probably have gone to the bottom, verifying prediction, with all on board; but, trained as he had been all his life by yachting in the wild weather so prevalent on his own west coast, he recognized the danger at once and was equal to it.

While the mutinous crew and indignant ship's officers are glaring at each other, and the fate of every one hangs in the balance, he takes the command, and in quick, resolute tones, which tell those who did not know it that he is as

good a sailor as soldier, gives the necessary orders.

His colour-serjeant Evan Grant, Hamish's son, is always on watch with him, and, thanks to his father's teaching, knows the boatswain's duties as well as the use of the whistle they had the foresight to obtain before leaving Portsmouth.

"All hands on deck," he pipes, as the wind howls through the rigging, the sails blowing nearly out of the bolt-ropes, the ship heeling on her beam-ends till the copper shows and the seas break clean over her.

"Lower away," and the united watches of sailor-like soldiers, who have been quietly warned and drilled for such an emergency, have the ship safe ere many know the peril she has passed through.

But a brief time further elapses before the mutineers are surrounded, driven below, and put in irons, while Charlie and his crew work the ship.

The captain, for a time speechless with anger at his men, terror at the almost inevitable

catastrophe through their disobedience of orders, and astonishment at the way in which the "lobsters" do the work so much better than his own lubberly, mongrel crew, soon recovers himself, and, while others breathe more freely, rushes up to Charlie, saying :

"By Harry, sir, you've saved the ship ! I never thought it was in any of you fine gentlemen or soldier officers to do such a thing ! Where the blank did you learn it ? Well, you've got a crew and the command of the ship, which is more than I have ;" and the unhappy man, nearly off his head, is about to dive below, when Charlie stops him, saying :

"No, no, captain, that won't do ! Every man to his trade. You would make a mess of my company in a week, though you might march past with them and impose upon the outsiders. Take these fellows of ours, with the Colonel's leave, under your command, until you have brought your men to their senses or get into port. You'll find they know more than many of the so-called A Bs, some of whom are better

able to box a horse than a compass, if all tales of the Baltic fleet be true."

The skipper is glad enough, when his professional heckles smooth themselves, to get such substitutes; and things go cheerily enough, except to the malcontents below, who probably felt they had made rather a mess of it, and sought some way of altering the state of things, which took an inconvenient form one night when it was least expected.

The cry of "fire!" is not a pleasant one to be awakened by, anywhere, whether it be in an ordinary way, or when one is high up in a strange house, or in a railway carriage; least of all with a large quantity of powder on board a ship a thousand miles from the nearest land, with boats enough for only about one-third of those who hear it.

It is in the middle watch, which Ian is keeping with his grenadiers, when going his rounds he smells the pungent odour.

The "alarm" at once brings every man to his post, and the military rapidity and precision

with which the engine-hose are attached, and the water begins to play on the point of danger, again rather astonishes the Captain, accustomed only to the merchant-seaman's style of work.

With infinite zest the Highlanders drive gallon after gallon into the lower fo'castle, where the crew are confined, and have originated the fire, probably with the idea that they would at once be released.

Half suffocated, almost drowned, and wholly frightened by the unexpected combination of the two elements most dreaded between decks, the rascals are allowed by their commander to yell for mercy some time after it is evident that they will not be hoisted by their own petard, ere he gives the word to stop the engines.

Thoroughly cowed, they give no further trouble, for, as the Irish first officer grimly says, "By japers! sir, they've taken all their water at a gulp. It's murderin dhry they'll find their bread for the rest of the voyage."

The seventy-fourth day of their life on the waters is coming to an end when the look-out

man sings out, "Sail a-head!"—and before long the smart man-o-war-like brig of the pilot service is alongside, sending on board those who are to take the 'Emu' up the difficult and dangerous passage of the Hoogly from the Sandheads.

As they steam along, the pilot, who turns out a queer fish, delivers his budget of Indian and European news to the surrounding group, who have been shut out from the world for the fifth of a year.

Slight built, sun-burnt, unmistakably a gentleman, there is a gleam in his eye, a set expression in the thin lips and determined jaw which those have who habitually look very closely into the face of death, and, from the familiarity, treat him with contempt.

"Yes, Colonel, Delhi has fallen, but you are in good time; Lucknow is besieged by the rebels, and much of the country is in a state of insurrection. It will take as many fine fellows like yours as old England can send out in a hurry to get things straight again."

As soon as it begins to darken, the steamer

comes to an anchor, and brandy with water goes to the pilot.

“ I say, Colin,” observes the “ Weasel ” to one of his brother subs., “ that’s the fourth go of what he calls ‘ brandy-pawnee ’ which has disappeared down his cinder-like throat in a very short space of time.”

“ Ah ! I have heard one gets to like the sickly stuff out here. I suppose it’s that which inflames his imagination. He’s the nearest thing to Munchausen I ever came across in the flesh. Did you hear him tell that yarn on the bridge about his fight in the water with a shark and a tiger ? ”

“ No ; but I can imagine its being rather tall.”

“ I am afraid I can’t do justice to it, but as far as I can remember I will give it you in his own words :

“ ‘ I was among the Sunderbunds out there one day when I felt so done up with the heat that I couldn’t help jumping overboard ; but as I knew there were a lot of sharks about, I strapped a

knife round my waist. Hardly had I struck out when I saw one coming at me. It was soon over. I can assure you nothing is easier with a little practice and nerve.) Fancy nerve, "Weasel," after a prolonged course of brandy-pawnee at the rate of sixteen per hour !) I waited for him, and, when he made his rush, turning on his back as they always do at the last moment, I dived below him, giving him the kukari, a Goorka knife I always carry on such occasions. This was repeated a few times, and then it was finished—at least as far as he was concerned ; but as I was making my way back, I saw the head of a tiger swimming in my direction, attracted of course by the smell of blood in the water. I was clear of where it was floating on the surface, so I waited until he had passed, and then, with a few rapid strokes, I was upon him and drove my knife into his spine just between the shoulders. He sank without a struggle, and I returned heated rather than cooled by my bathe'."

"What a pity Lundy of the Wellingtonians

isn't on board ! He is hard to beat in that line. But does he keep on drinking at this rate ?”

“No ; I have made careful enquiries of the leadsman, who humbly imitates his leader, and he declares he draws the line at thirty-two brandy-pawnees a day, beginning only when the anchor drops ; after which he turns in, and will be as fresh in the morning as you saw him when he came on board !”

“Happily for us ! I hope I sha'n't dream of him. Conceive at the end of the year having got through ninety dozen of brandy to your own cheek ! I wonder what the chief thinks of him !”

As they steam against the increasing current next morning, there are many glances of enquiry among those who have heard the pilot's yarns and seen his capacity for strong waters.

Presently they have an example of his way of getting out of a difficulty. The boats on the river increase in number as they go up, but one look at the lithe figure in its snowy white ducks on the bridge is enough for them all, and they

give the 'Emu' a wide berth as she steams among them.

At last, when nearing the dangerous shoal called "James and Mary," a large native boat with some fifty people in it is seen passing rapidly down and across her course. The men in the bows shout to the natives, who, seeing their danger, paddle with unwonted vigour—but too late; in spite of appeals and protestations the pilot will not divert his course by a hand's-breadth.

There is a crash, a smothered chorus of yells from the water, a fierce suppressed groan from the excited soldiers on board, and, dashing over the *débris*, the steamer leaves half a hundred wretches struggling in the water.

"What would you, gentlemen?" he says afterwards, when he is rather hotly questioned. "Had I gone to right or left at that moment the current would have caught us broadside on; in an instant we would have touched the shoal, and the next would have found the 'Emu' a wreck as quickly as the ship whose fate names

the sandbank. I don't think many on board could get as easily ashore as those niggers you are so careful of. They can swim like otters."

"By Jove! he has method in his madness," mutters the "Weasel" to his chum, as in the distance they see the black specks on the river-side.

Silent, if not convinced, the Colonel is not sorry when he finds himself alongside the Ghaut, and the voyage safely over.

CHAPTER XV.

“O thou bloody prison, fatal and ominous to noble peers.”

Earl Rivers

WALKING up and down the deck for the last time before disembarking, the Weasel says, “It is devilish odd, Paul! Here have I been swearing at this rotten old tin-kettle of a ship for nearly three months, ever since I first heard her name. In her we have certainly faced more than the ordinary ‘perils of the sea.’ Her captain has checkmated us in every attempt at fun, whether it was flying a kite, fighting a main of cocks from the hen-coops, or playing leap-frog round the decks, because it interfered with the way of the ship! his puritanical ideas! or the feelings of the binnacle! And because there is

not the remotest chance of ever seeing her again, I feel quite down in the mouth ! ”

“ Ah ! ” says Elliot, throwing away his cigar as the men prepare to fall in for their last parade on deck. “ Perhaps instinct tells you we may be a good deal worse off before we are better.”

“ Or rather—it sounds nicer—may it not be the sense of impending loss which adds to the value of everything, even the meanest.”

“ Weasel, you have been reading ? ”

“ No ; I look upon that as a waste of life, besides being a kind of larceny.”

“ What ! the sun has already touched the boy’s head ? ”

“ Not a bit, most noble Fergus. Fools spend time in writing, and wise men suck their brains. When you have invented a process by which thought can be produced on paper as quickly as it evolves, I may join the first lot.”

“ And the other ? ”

“ Well, some one must dig up the potatoes, I suppose. I am content to find them *à la maître d’hôtel*.”

“ This gets serious, Paul.”

“ A three months’ voyage has much to answer for if it has brought our Weasel to philosophy.”

“ You are wondrous kind, my Captain. We never love so much as when we fear our *inamorata* is going to throw us over. But be easy. I promise to look a greater fool than I am until the real one joins — competitive examinations must produce some splendid specimens shortly.”

“ They’ll find it hard to turn out anything better all round,” said the somewhat stolid Fergus, admiringly, as the Weasel leaves them with an air which would secure him the *rôle* of *jeune premier* on any stage. “ Perhaps it’s as well he don’t read ; eh, Paul ? ”

“ He might know too much for some of us ! ” laughingly answers Elliot. “ But I fancy we’ll all have to go in for something of the sort before long, or make room for others who can, and will. Ink *stays* better than pipe-clay.”

As they march across the Maidan to Fort William in the pleasant October morning, with

the first faint sense of a freshness in the air, the blood of many an exiled Scot is stirred by the old familiar airs of his native land. And the fair ones, who are riding, hasten to look yet more closely at the picturesque soldiers, who, bronzed and weather-beaten, carry in their faces as on their breasts the evidence that they may well be relied on in the hour of need.

To most of the natives the uniform is one of strange significance, and it is speedily accepted as a fact that the Queen has sent out these fierce-looking women in short petticoats to avenge the slaughtered ones at Cawnpore.

It is not easy for the practical Highlanders to understand seeing the Governor-General escorted by a party of unarmed Cavalry, and the sentries at Government House with ramrods only in their hands! But everything seems anomalous, from the detention of troops in Calcutta while the strain up-country is almost more than the struggling forces at Cawnpore and Lucknow can contend with, to the flood of letters from home which greets those happy enough to have good

correspondents, while they themselves have been unable to write a word.

Charlie needs all his self-possession to accept with outward calm the budget which the Pipe-Major hands him. Happily the writing of the first letter that meets his eye is that of Clarice, and the absence of any tokens of woe relieve him of the fears which he has hardly dared to acknowledge to himself.

While he is turning them over and over, unopened, in the way one does at times, Ian comes to his aid with wholesome chaff. "Hulloa, Master! You handle your letters as if they were the pleasant oil of our childhood. If I were not sure that the simile is a very bad one, I would say, 'Swallow them at a gulp.' For myself, I have not even a despairing dun left to bother me."

"Be grateful for the smallest of mercies, as the Kirk minister was when his guidwife gave him could skate for dinner," says the Weasel. "Here am I overcome with unpalatable allusions to my last hours at Portsmouth, of which a horribly

distorted report seems to have reached the scandalized ears of my relatives."

"The Jew will have his revenge somehow, you may depend upon it," says Charlie, going off to read his letters.

In every word of those which, lover-like, he takes first, there breathes the tender, true-hearted woman; and he thinks with a thrill of happiness what a daughter he has left with his mother, who writes full of a quiet strength which astonishes while it comforts him.

During their detention in Calcutta from the old and never-ending story, "want of transport," the Highlanders devote themselves to the agreeable change which the life there affords to those who have endured the voyage round the Cape.

"Are you going to the Course this evening, Charlie?" asks Ian, as they are discussing tiffin.

"Yes; come," he replies, helping himself again to the curried prawns, of whose natural history, according to local tradition, they are happily ignorant. "I was there last night with the Colonel. It's rather fun watching the Eastern

idea of Rotten Row. There is a quaint mixture which makes one feel inclined to laugh, but it's checked the next instant by the thoughts which rise up as the carriages go by filled with many so different from those we see at home."

"The Course has material advantages too over our Lady's Mile," says the Weasel, emerging from the depths of a tankard of iced beer. "If you are athirst—I wonder when one isn't out here?—you can turn into a kiosk and get anything you like, from 'silver top' to hock-and-seltzer."

As they walk down by the river-side they cannot help contrasting the pale and somewhat sad faces of the ladies with the fresh, healthy, happy ones they have left so far behind.

"They have need to be poor things when one thinks of the summer heat they had to endure, and the horrors they heard of, with the contingent possibilities which the alarmists were never tired of anticipating," says Charlie. "I was talking to one of the big civilians this morning, and he said if Lord Canning had lost

his head and yielded to the panic-stricken entreaties which poured in upon him, there would have been such an exodus as would have ended in another Black Hole."

"And yet to see the quiet looks of all these grades of colour, one would little suspect there are the seething differences of race and religion, which culminated in the fiendish outbreak that has brought us out here."

"No. They tell me that the Nana was mixing with all our people at Cawnpore up to a very short time before the mutiny came to a head. Look at that fat yellow fellow there. He looks as if he hadn't a thought beyond his food, though I hear he is one of the most plotting of the State prisoners, whom they allow, with doubtful wisdom, to go at large."

"They are a good deal like their own wild animals—not bad to look at, when you get used to the colour, but dangerous if you over trust them," says Ian, as they turn and lean over the rails while the kaleidoscopic assemblage passes by. "Yes," he continues after a little, "it's a

strange scene, with no parallel in the world, I should say,—the conqueror and the conquered,—the Eastern and the Western,—the Christian, Mahomedan, Hindoo, Parsee, sinking their most antagonistic feelings on every vital point, temporal and eternal, to a dull level of indifference, to meet here for air, show, fashion. I wonder if Surajah Dowlah has an idea of what is going on now ?”

“ Very trying for him if it be so. Like most who have committed great crimes, he would probably feel intensely the futility of that for which he suffered.”

CHAPTER XVI.

“On, on, on, on, on ! to the breach, to the breach !”

Bardolph.

“WE'RE off at last,” says the Adjutant, dashing into the ante-room before mess ; “the order has just come for us to proceed without delay to Cawnpore, and we leave at daybreak to-morrow morning.”

“That's good hearing, Forbes, for we have been in this place too long if one can believe half the reports that come down from the front.”

“There's no doubt, Grant, that they have as much as they can do to hold their own at Lucknow and Cawnpore, but I hope we'll be in time, though it will only be by hard marching.”

“After keeping us doing nothing here for a

week ! Oh, my poor feet ! I know how tender they'll be after those many months on board ship," plaints the privileged Weazel, in solemn tones, which makes the Chief smile, and say :

"Put less whisky inside to-night, and rub some of it on your feet, Fletcher. You will find it a rare thing to harden the skin. And a little soap is not bad either."

But the railway as far as Raneegunge, and the well-arranged bullock-waggon train, leaves even the softest little cause for grumbling or hardship.

At Allahabad comes the startling news of Windham's check at Cawnpore, with pressing orders for the forced march of every available man.

"We must be ready in an hour," says the Colonel, as he gives his orders to the Adjutant. And they are. Ere the clock has struck they are pushing on, with all the quiet determination of their country, along the Grand Trunk Road, which, broad, level, and smooth as a riband, stretches like a main artery from Calcutta to the frontier on the North-West.

“This promises to be a stiffish job, gentlemen,” says the Chief, as, after marching all night in the choking dust which ascends from an Indian road in the dry season under the tramp of many feet, the officers gather round him to discuss the grateful weed and have a welcome cup of tea, while the men snatch a hasty meal and such sleep as they can in the brief halt that is ordered. “I have sent my horse to the rear so that you may not think I expect more of others than I do myself.

“As I am determined to march continuously until we reach Cawnpore, I have taken a hint from a Russian experience I had not long ago ; and, if you see that the men follow my orders implicitly, I think we shall make as good a march as the famous one of Crawford’s Light Division.

“There will be three main halts of an hour each in the twenty-four, for a meal which the native cooks will prepare. The first forty-five minutes will be devoted to sleep while it is being got ready ; the last fifteen will suffice for the eating of it and the subsequent pipe.

“Every hour there will be a halt of a quarter of an hour, in which the men can have ten minutes’ sleep, and five for a smoke, a mouthful of cold tea, and a biscuit. The officers will discourage the men from drinking or smoking while actually marching, and will take advantage of the halts to ease the footsore with the bandages and ointment they will provide themselves with from the hospital stores.

“There will be no issues of grog until the march is over. The knapsacks of the band and pipers will be carried for them, so that they can play alternately for five minutes every quarter of an hour; and if the men are encouraged to sing I hope we shall cover the ground in time, and get in fit for immediate action.”

“That’s a very good idea, Colonel, about the music and singing; still better to stick to tea, and abolish the grog when sleep has to be fought against. Did you learn that when you were in the Caucasus?” asks Mackay.

“Partly, Doctor. I was going up, after the war, from Taman to Tiflis with an aide of the

Grand Duke ; and I found he was so much fresher than I was, after travelling incessantly for a day and a night on a telega, that I watched his plan of operations,—it was at every change of horses to lie down full length on his back, sleep till the horses were in, then eat a biscuit or sandwich, swallow a cup of tea, and smoke a cigarette ; after which he seemed to be a new man. Following his example, I can assure you I was fresher at the end of the third days' jolting over the roadless country in a springless, backless, seated cart than I was the first night. And I can quite believe his story that he travelled without a halt from the Caucasus to St. Petersburg, and was able to enjoy a ball at the Winter Palace the night he delivered his despatches."

"Ah, sir," says the Weasel, "I fear we shall have no dancing at the end of our *trajet*."

"You will have more serious work than that, my boy, when we get in ; but what is the matter with your face ?"

"Nothing, sir ; only a too intimate acquaintance with the butt-end of a rifle. After that

halt in the middle of the night, which was so pleasant that I would have given a month's pay gladly to have had another hour's sleep, I accomplished the feat of walking and dozing at the same time, but the result was, I am afraid, a severe loss of teeth."

"We shall have to give you a more appropriate name, Weasel," says Charlie, "if you get caught napping in that way; but stick to it. I saw a young bugler going all night better than most of my company."

"That's it," answers the youngster, as he cocks his bonnet and rejoins his men. "'*Multum in parvo*' is a good deal better than the other side up, but when it's applied to one's creature comforts the theory is better than the practice."

The severest trial comes to an end at last, and brings without fail compensation to those who have cheerfully and manfully borne it, as the Highlanders find when at last they reach the longed-for camping-ground; though ere the last mile is covered more than one strong man is seen

to break down temporarily under the tremendous strain he may endure but not master.

Halting for a few minutes to pull themselves together, the satisfaction which comes of a successful struggle with privation steals over them, and few looking at them would think they are at the end of an extraordinary march.

While they are thus standing there runs through them a shuddering question as the head of a long straggling train of carriages, carts, dhoolies, elephants, camels and horses approaches.

It is the siege-worn remnant of sick and wounded men, women, and, alas! how few, children from Lucknow, wending their weary, painful way under escort towards that home upon which so many may never cast their longing eyes.

From a litter as it passes comes the feeble enquiry from a wounded man, "What Highlanders are these?"

"The Red, sir," answers the Piper, proudly, saluting the wasted, eager officer as he leans out.

“ Ah ! my brother is in the Camerons,” says the disappointed invalid, as he falls back with all the fretfulness of the sick.

While the ghastly column goes by, a poor lady clasps her fatherless babe, survivor of a once happy family, as she says half aloud, while she gazes at the strong eager men grouped on either side, “ Oh, if these had been with us, how different it might have been ! ”

How small the world is ! Suddenly, as a carriage of more pretension to conventional appearance than anything else in the sad assemblage is going past, a startlingly cheery voice calls out, “ Why, Charlie ! who would have thought it possible ? ”

Somewhat amazed, Charlie springs forward, and, ere he quite knows how, finds himself embracing a remarkably pretty cousin, whose existence he had temporarily forgotten.

“ Amy ? Impossible ! ” he exclaims, as he draws back somewhat doubtfully, and gazes at the face which an Indian climate, coupled with the horrors and privations of the past four

months, has paled and refined into one of exquisite beauty.

“Then pray, sir, explain your conduct,” she retorts with a laugh, which is echoed by the Weasel, a keenly attentive witness of the episode. “Have you so completely and quickly forgotten Amy, your playmate and pupil in many a pleasant, if mischievous, holiday?”

“Forgive me. I had indeed not remembered that I might see you out here; but how could I recognize the little girl with rather red hair in the—”

“Pray don’t finish what I fear would end in a doubtful compliment,” she interrupts, with a bewitching *moue*, as she affects to put her hands to her ears, which has the double effect of also showing the appreciative Weasel how shapely they are. “I know I am looking a terrible ‘Guy’; but if you had an idea of all we have gone through,” she adds with a painful sigh, which seems to bring back with it memories of infinite sorrow to her lovely eyes, “you would not be surprised if I looked aged and hideous as one of

the Cawdor witches. Alas ! we are going on, and I must say ‘ Good-bye.’ To think we should have met thus, and for a minute only ! God bless you, Charlie ! Take care of yourself, as far as you can ; you will find my husband somewhere with the Chief’s staff, and he will tell you all we have had to suffer.”

“ Addio, then, Amy,” says Charlie, recovering himself, and wringing her small white hand which has found its way back to his. “ Shall we meet again ? ”

“ I hope so, and perhaps before very long. I must go to Calcutta to get rigged out, and will probably stay there till the hot weather, when, if I can, I’ll come up to the Hills to be nearer Harry. Fare thee well, dear coz.”

And thus part two who meet once more by such strange accident, little thinking of the weaving of the web which is to surround and entangle their lives.

Attracted at an Inverness meeting by the appearance and attentions of the soldier-like Colonel Gardenne, Amy Macrae fancied her

heart had gone with her head three years or so before, when she married the only man she had ever deemed worthy of comparison with her handsome cousin; who, however, be it frankly said, had never thought matrimonially of the fascinating girl who, though very much to him, was always overshadowed by Clarice's queenly beauty.

Yet, without imputation upon his loyalty, it cannot be denied that he casts after the now most fair Amy looks and thoughts of admiration which she could not have won from him when last they met. While she, as the column moves away, ponders on the strange chance which has brought up from the inmost depths a vision of possible happiness, which she had thought long buried out of sight when she first came to know and feel how Clarice filled every thought of the heart she would have given everything to call her own.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ O mistress mine, where are you roaming ? ”

Clown, Twelfth Night.

As the autumn wears on Lady Amat's health improves so much that at last she consents to accept the Beauchamps' invitation to spend Christmas at Champ Royal, one of Queen Elizabeth's favourite Burys which she had given in a fit of generosity to the handsome ancestor of the General.

Never since the night of her visions has Lady Amat been able to look at the arras in her room without a strange feeling of comfort mingled with horror, which makes her less willing than was her wont to meet the morning salutation of the faithful Hamish, who rarely fails to greet

her with an inquiry, as yet easy for her to answer, touching the news from India.

Thus it is that the Amats find themselves staying with the Beauchamps when the news of Charlie's arrival at Calcutta reaches England.

Notwithstanding the increasingly grave aspect of affairs, the detention of the loved one from the actual scenes of action lulls them into a state of comparative tranquillity of mind, which enables them to enter into such Christmas festivities as is the custom of the Clayshire county folk to indulge in.

Standing in a fine old park, the trees of which suggest the thought that the virgin queen may have spent many a happy day in the shades of their primeval-looking branches, Champ Royal is an almost perfect specimen of the best homes of her time.

As if to refute the commonly accepted, but false, impression that it is a county of feverish marsh and considerable plainness of feature, the picturesque old house rears its many gables and turrets to a height of about four hundred feet

above the sea, thanks to the swelling ridge from which it looks over many a fair mile of well-timbered country, wooded only enough to satisfy the lover of sylvan landscape without destroying the hopes of the fox-hunter.

At a distance from the house which prevents the suggestion of damp, runs round on three sides the moat which, in bygone days, the absence of Yarmouth smacks, and of the punctual if torpid Great Eastern, had made a necessary means of providing for the frequent demands of Catholic fasts.

On the south side is laid out an exquisite Italian garden, owing much to the travelled and cultivated tastes of Clarice and her mother.

For neighbours there are not a few of those types which England alone, we think, can show.

Cultured scholars, who at Eton or Harrow had not thought it all boating or cricket, and at Balliol or Trinity used their opportunity so well that when the world of pleasure lay before them they preferred to devote their talents to the service of their country. For mates, have

these not chosen the daughters of men who, a generation before, had done likewise?

Daughters there are too, who, though they may not all equal Clarice, the acknowledged beauty of the county, are admirable planets of so fair a moon.

The sons, are they not ever absent when they are wanted at home, until a stranger might well ask if none are grown in these parts? Yet in the House, at the Bar, in the Services, they are making their way to the front in a manner which needs no further reply to the croakers who suggest the deterioration of the coming race.

At that charming distance which precludes too great an intimacy with those who may not be quite consonant with one's tastes, and affords such a pleasant excuse for asking your friends to come to you for days instead of the few evening hours, is Saxbury—the almost palatial seat of the Trevors, the last of whom is the fair Eila, whose mother's premature death has made it, until of late, but a little-frequented home.

Hoping to keep at bay the dread anxiety which hovers so near her daughter, Mrs. Beauchamp has filled her house for the Christmas week; including among her guests the Trevors, Lady Alice Campbell's son Archie, in the Fusiliers, and two others of that pleasant lot—Montie Drummond and Victor Murray—who have already seen enough of "the Beauchamp" and "the Trevor" not to be insensible to their personal and pecuniary charms; which latter, strange to say, are not exaggerated by the vulgar.

As the three young Guardsmen settle themselves in the comfortable break for the longish drive before them from the small country station, the single-handed porter grips his well-earned tips while he wishes them a happy Christmas, and mutters as they drive off, "That's tha sort oi loikes allers tu see. More especial 'bout thay toimes. Hansum be uz hansum du, an they be roight gude at boath, says oi."

"Well, Archie, what have you been up to this autumn? They say Charlie Grant has been

cutting us all out with 'the Beauchamp' in that northern den of his," says Montie Drummond, who, not long back from an expedition to Finland, has an idea of his friend's game, and likes getting a rise out of him.

"Some people say, hear, and believe anything," replies Campbell, coming freely, as he settles himself back in a corner, for he is not over pleased to find others may have heard of an obstacle to his plans which he means to overcome. "There's nothing in it. They have known each other for years, and when he went off to India in a hurry the Beauchamps stayed on at Amat to cheer up the old people. But if rumour is to be believed, Vic," turning to Murray, "your shrine has been worshipped with considerable ardour by Ronald Elliot, who can give points to most men and beat them at that game."

"If I thought old Trevor would give his daughter to a penniless captain in a marching regiment I might feel alarmed," says Murray, stroking his black moustache with much com-

placency, as he mentally compares his contingent Dukedom with the meagre position, present and prospective, as far as he knows it, of his possible rival.

“In any case,” says Drummond, shrugging his shoulders, “you two can make all the running now without much fear of intrusion, for they can’t be into Lucknow and back again yet awhile, and there’s always the chance of a friendly bullet giving you a help.”

“My dear boy, you don’t know how an accident of that kind cuts the other way sometimes. Look at Reyas and Bridgerout—the moment they came home half-a-dozen women were wild to marry them, legs or no legs! No; our best friends in such a case would be sympathetic ladies in the Hills, where Satan finds such mischief still for idle hearts to do, if Arthur Gough is to be relied on! He says that after the Sikh business the wounded warriors up there were in much greater need of ice than they had ever been in the Plains.”

Meanwhile, in happy ignorance of the free and

easy way they are being discussed, Eila, who has not seen Clarice since they parted at Amat in September, is enjoying a gossip with her in the privacy of a sanctum never invaded but by her mother and her intimates.

As there is a meet handy in a day or two, Eila and her father have ridden their hunters over ; and, as she lies stretched on the wolf-skin in front of the fire, her *svelte* figure shows every line of its perfect form, while the rich brunette beauty of her oval face glows with the effects of exercise in the bracing air, giving fresh light to her large, liquid brown eyes, and a yet lovelier tinge to her clear, soft skin.

After discussing the welcome cup of tea, and every topic but that which lies nearest to their breasts, which each has avoided though she knows well that the other reads her thoughts as accurately as her own, Eila, looking steadily into the fire, and throwing as much indifference into her tone as if she were asking the date of the next eclipse, invisible at Greenwich, says, "What news, my Queen ?"

Clarice, to whom the luxury of a tea-gown has not yet been divulged, is, happily for her reputation for *sang froid*, shielding her fair face from the too ardent logs by a cunning contrivance of white lace and blue satin, which contrasts well with the thick clinging folds of a ruby velvet *peignoir*; she flushes for a moment vehemently at the question, and then with returning pallor calmly answers:

“None, dear, since they reached Calcutta. Charlie’s last letter is dated from there, but says they may march up-country at any moment.”

“Had they a good voyage out?”

“A very quick one, apparently, considering all things. They had several escapes from fire and shipwreck, and he tells me now that before they sailed many expected they would never reach India.”

A quick, sharp sigh, the white nervous hand closing involuntarily the fan with which she has been playing, tell Clarice the old, old tale without looking at Eila’s face, which is working with irrepressible emotion.

There is a silence which seems to endure for hours, while each thinks of the past and the possible future.

Clarice, with the right to build her châteaux where she will, falls to dreaming of the happiness she believes in store for her ; but Eila has no such wonderland of joy to wander in, and, when at last a spark from the crackling beechwood wakes them from their reveries, Clarice finds her weeping ! Silent, great, large drops, which like those that presage the thunder-storm, are not the less momentous that they come from an apparently clear sky in which has hitherto been all bright and happy sunshine.

In an instant she is on the rug beside her, and at the first touch of her lips Eila turns and is folded in her caressing arms, sobbing like a child whose heart would break in its first, great, young grief.

“ Eila ? ” at last she says, as the shapely head sinks on her bosom, with the sigh of relief that comes to those who at last find the touch of sympathy which is needed to unlock the skeleton-holding cupboard.

“ Oh, Clarice !—it’s weak, I know, and perhaps unmaidenly, to care, still more to betray it as I am doing now, for one who has not given me the right to think he will ever be anything to me ; but he is so true and noble in his nature, I feel sure that he was silent for some good reason which he would have explained had time permitted. You know how events crowded themselves into those few happy days at Amat, where I thought they would have rolled into weeks, and we—— !”

“ Yes, indeed I do ; but perhaps it was because I was so occupied with my own thoughts,” Clarice says with a blushing, happy smile, “ that I did not know what wild work was going on around until after they had gone ; though Charlie did give me a hint. Poor Olive is more than flattened by her handsome Fergus ; and even the practical Julia seems to regret her Giant more than she likes to confess. Tell me, dearest, if you will, how it was with you ? ”

“ I hardly know. It came with a sort of rush. We met for the first time at Ascot, and

I could not help being struck by his charming face and caressing manner, which seemed to grow more welcome each time we saw each other during the rest of the season, and when he came to Amat he appeared to seek to please me in a way I felt to be genuine ; and yet ! ”—she breaks off with a sigh that speaks volumes, and looks wistfully at Clarice, whose face expresses the deepest sympathy and interest.

“ And yet ! He said nothing before he left ? ”

“ Yes ! No ! Not quite. On that terrible morning when the hills looked more lovely than ever, and all Nature seemed to bid us live in the present for to-morrow we die, he walked with me on the terrace, and said what made me feel he was tied by something which prevented his tongue confirming what his eyes had so often declared. But he led me to hope that when he came back he would be more free, and that he trusted I would not then have forgotten him.”

“ My dearest ! But this is very serious. You don’t think he is fettered in any way that would prevent his asking you to be his wife ? ”

“ I do indeed, or I have much mistaken his meaning.”

“ Surely then, you cannot think of him ? ”

“ Yes,” replied poor Eila, burying her face in her hands as she turns away instinctively at the suggestion ; “ only the more I fear, I cannot help it. I must own it to you, for it has been eating into my heart all these weary weeks since he left so abruptly, as if he would fain unburden himself, and yet dared not.”

“ What makes you think then that he will be less reticent if you meet again ? ”

“ I don’t know ; but there was that in his face as he looked into my eyes which no man could assume who was playing a woman false. On the contrary, I would say, if it were not too flattering a hope, that it was from some high rather than unworthy motive he was silent.”

“ You must be very sure, darling,” says Clarice, touched beyond words with the pathos of her reply, and taking her extended hand in both her own. “ How gladly I would help and comfort you, but I can only now say, wait and

hope. I too think he is not one to play an ignoble part. If he has conveyed the impression you speak of, cherish it, and be confident that as time trieth truth, so does trial purify, as it often strengthens, love. Come! I know you may think it's easy to bear another's troubles, but don't be downcast by the necessity of waiting. That at least I share with you. Remember the old motto at Penshurst, '*Tout vient à point à qui peut attendre.*'"

But while she speaks, her own eyes fill as she thinks of all that may happen to those so exposed to perils, the real magnitude and nature of which she happily cannot conceive.

"Thank you for your hopeful thoughts. I know it's foolish to give way as I did just now, but I could not help contrasting our comfort and luxury with all they may be going through. But you have given me what I want most, a confidante. Now, perhaps, sometimes we can talk over the future; and if you have any tidings from Captain Grant, you will let me know, won't you?"

“I will do more. In my next to Charlie, I will tell him that as I am interested in Captain Elliot, I hope he will never omit to let me hear of him when he writes.”

“Ah, darling, that is kind indeed. But don’t you think he may imagine there lies a thought beyond?”

“Who can tell?” says Clarice gaily, seeing her more cheerful; “it’s quite possible that they put up their letters to auction as Captain Marryat’s middies did, but I don’t think Charlie will allow any of mine to become the property of another. Come, and I’ll show you your old room, for we dine earlier to-night as the roads are so heavy, and we have quite ten miles to get to Knebstowe.”

As they assemble before dinner in the quaint dark old gallery—which by Mrs. Beauchamp’s fancy is kept dimly lit until their return through it to the saloon, reserved for state occasions such as this—each is occupied in conjecturing who the new-comer is; for, to please the younger ones in the country who have never seen a

- masquerade, it has been decided that this, to celebrate the silver wedding of the popular M. F. H., shall be a fancy ball.

Mrs. Beauchamp, one of the beauties of her day, looks every inch a queen in the dress of her ancestress, Katherine Parr,—who was not the least favoured of the fickle Harry's bewitching spouses.

Clarice's reluctance to go having been overcome by her mother's arguments, she has routed out of an old mail, which belonged to her grand-aunt when at the court of St. Petersburg, a Gallician dress that the old lady herself had worn in her young days to the immense admiration of the first Alexander.

Certainly the discerning taste of that gallant emperor would not have disadvantageously compared the niece with the first wearer, who, Rumour said, had made such wild but unrequited work in the inflammable organ which by courtesy was called his heart.

Eila's dark beauty could hardly be enhanced by any dress she chose. Yet the critical

Victor Murray, as he presses forward to make his bow, cannot but admit that he has never seen her more fitted for conquest ; though, as far as he is concerned, that is already over. There remains but to know what terms she may accord him ; for, self-complacent as he may seem to others, he is well aware that she has never given him the slightest token of more than a well-ordered, mutually amusing, *camaraderie*, based on such social field-days as London crushes, a Goodwood meeting, and Cowes afford.

The other ladies of the party have not drawn very heavily on their imaginations ; but, invested with the halo of temporary beauty, produced by powder, patches, and rouge, are well content to accept such unoccupied devotion as Montie Drummond and the other unattached young men may place at their disposal.

The General's handsome face and figure are well set forth by the ancient dress of the Cold-streams, to which the three younger Guardsmen give fitting pendants in the uniform of the Fusiliers of the same period.

Lord Amat's tartan, as a Chief of "the '45," carry the minds of more than one of the party back to a very different scene; and Colonel Trevor, as a horseman of Ligonier, looks the *beau ideal* of a cavalry officer of the olden time.

Thus, as they file down the long gallery, the *coup d'œil* is well worthy of the house and its surroundings.

Never did Lord Victor Murray feel less inclined to value his social rank than when he finds its exigencies separating him for the time by immeasurable dinner-table space from the object of his present suit.

Archie Campbell, more immediately fortunate in his humbler distance from 'the salt,' devotes himself to the entertainment of the fair Pole, who, ignorant of his designs, is well content to accept him as a cousin and dear friend of her beloved Charlie.

Did we but know to how little of personal advantages or attainments we are indebted for the apparent success on which we are so apt to plume ourselves, what pitfalls dug by our own vanity we might avoid!

“I was very sorry not to be able to join your pleasant party at Amat this autumn, Miss Beauchamp,” says Archie, as they range themselves at the dinner-table, “but for once duty was inexorable, and I had instead the doubtful felicity of hearing from my sisters of all your doings.”

“You speak generally or personally, Colonel Campbell?” asks Clarice, with a laugh, not altogether an easy one.

“*Cela dépend!* But it must have been a bore rather for you younger ones when the gay Charlie and his friends had to leave so suddenly,” he says with intention as he looks calmly into her eyes.

“Ah, yes,” replies poor Clarice, paling somewhat under the suggestive tone, and feeling as if he had suddenly thrown cold water down her back. “It was a terrible shock to his dear mother; but she recovered wonderfully. How well she is looking to-night; isn’t she?” casting an affectionate glance in the direction of Lady Amat; who, in a picturesque Greek costume and

the congenial society of her husband's old friend, the General, is more like the happy bride he had carried off some five-and-twenty years before than he has seen her look for long.

"I can imagine what a blank their departure must have made; but perhaps it's as well. Charlie is an impressionable young dog, and"—looking across at Eila, playing havoc with a sixth-form boy, who, in all the glory of his first evening pink with powder and black tights, is blindly following the seductive path he so suddenly discovered when she turned upon him the electric light of her too fascinating eyes, and talked to him as if he were already a man—"our fair friend over there might have made my volatile sister's hand not quite so certain as she fancies."

"I hardly understand or follow you," somewhat indignantly retorts Clarice. "I have known Captain Grant for many years, and I do not think he is at all what you seem to imply,—that detestable thing, a flirt,—if such a term can be applied to anyone worthy to be called a man."

“Oh, pray don’t think I implied anything derogatory to Master Charlie. He is a very good fellow—*de absentis nil nisi bonum*—all I meant was, he is not one to lose an opportunity of worshipping if his devotion is likely to be rewarded. There was a certain cousin, poor girl!—whose young affections he was supposed to have blighted and driven into marrying a man old enough to be her father, who carried her off some few years ago to India, where, by the way, they are likely enough to meet if the Sepoys have spared her. Then there was—”

“Pray spare me a catalogue of your cousin’s love tales as you detail them, Colonel Campbell,” says Clarice, with a flashing eye and quivering lip, which tell him all too much, as he calmly accepts the explosion he had partly counted on. “I thought that sort of thing was only done by the weaker sex.”

A man of less experience might be discomfited. Not so Campbell. He is too well practised, and knows every shade more or less of the character of those women in whom he is sufficiently in-

terested to study. Having, therefore, sown the seeds he means to germinate for his ulterior purpose, he laughs and says: "Are we not masquerading to-night, Mademoiselle? In the time of this coat," glancing at his sleeve, "men were nowhere if they did not take every advantage of their opportunities; but let us forget the period of our garments, and discuss the more absorbing topics of the day;" and, gliding easily into the channels he knows so well, it is not long before Clarice, listening to his pleasant nothings, is more than half inclined to believe he has been only playing a part—though there was that in the tone of what he said which leaves an impression to return again with redoubled force in days to come, as he intends.

Bored as are most of the men by the long drive, except the Eton boy, who is looking forward to his promised waltz with Eila as only those can appreciate who remember how they hungered for their first dance with their first divinity, they feel more than recompensed when they get to Knebstowe.

Fate has denied Frank Eversleigh and his wife the blessing of children. People say it is in the air! Anyhow, they are not the only couple in those parts who know not the trials of governesses, school and college bills, the vexing questions of ineligibles, allowances, and the various ills to which fond parents with skittish fillies or wayward colts are so exposed in these days, when wholesome discipline and old-fashioned deference seem to be marching out of sight hand in hand.

So they are beloved by all the young people in the county, whom they spoil, as grandparents allow their second generation of offspring latitudes they have sternly forbidden to their own children. Because the pleasure thus given is reflected on the donors, while the after and possibly disagreeable consequences recoil on those who are responsible.

Was there a girl to be brought out, if her mother was no more, or temporarily incapacitated, who so glad to chaperone her as 'Lady Fan'? Had she made an impression which it was

desirable to deepen, what more natural than they should meet again at Knebstowe? Did a young fellow ride straight and want a mount? Was there not always at least a kennel horse fit to go, and, perhaps, not much the worse of an extra gallop?

Thus, with ample means to gratify their proclivities, the Eversleighs kept Knebstowe and its neighbourhood alive after their return from Scotland in September, until his parliamentary duties, clashing somewhat with those of the M. F. H., tore them away to Park Lane. As the Champ Royal party, late of course, cross the fine old hall they see on every side the evidences of the exquisite taste for which their hostess is so famous—not only in the artistic arrangements of exotic plants and divers shrubs, but in the devices and expedients by which the various galleries and rooms branching off in sundry directions seem to promise unlimited opportunities for the gratification of each individual's tastes, whether they may incline to the study of art, beauty, or yet more carnal pleasures.

"This is charming, Miss Trevor," says Victor Murray, as they stop after their first round in the waltz she has given him on entering the ball-room. "Why don't we always live in costume? Plain people would no longer exist, and ill-dressed ones could not."

"If wearing other folk's clothes would make us permanently more charming it might answer, but I doubt it," says Eila, who is quite aware that she can afford to appear as the Lady Godiva, if necessary.

"As a rule those who are here to-night are indebted to temporary aid for their appearance, and could not keep up the pace. You should see them to-morrow morning." Eila seldom looks to greater advantage than in the freshness of her breakfast toilette. Of this she is possibly not ignorant.

"No. If you want everyone to be good-looking and presentable you must eliminate our many national faults of feature and fashion, often exaggerated beyond any possible line of beauty."

"That would be a work of magnitude and, as

far as I am concerned, quite unnecessary when there is so much as perfect as may be," replies Victor, with a meaning glance in his handsome dark eyes, which turn towards her with a passionate ardour she has little dreamt of as existing for herself.

"Yes; you are right," she answers, skilfully mistaking him, and looking at Clarice, who sweeps by at the moment. "Is she not quite lovely? With her it never is a question of occasion or costume. I do not wonder people raved about her as they did last season; but happily it has had no effect upon her, as on some with far less reason to be so exalted."

"For those who admire that style I suppose it is about perfect," answers Victor with much gravity. He is not a man to rave of one woman to another. "I confess to preferring Velasquez to Rubens, though the latter, poor fellow, must have gone down to his grave bewailing the hard fate which gave him those huge Flemish models instead of the graceful beauty of the classic south."

“I doubt it, Lord Victor. The taste grows upon what it feeds. Rubens, I think, has given ample proof of the direction in which his lay. Besides, don’t you always find that, while mountainous, picturesque regions have inhabitants to match, in low countries like Holland, Belgium, Russia, the features of the peoples are as flat and uninteresting?”

“Possibly; for bar none the handsomest race I have ever seen is bred in the Caucasus, and the German or Calmuck is not fair to look at, generally; but, on the other hand, the Welshman, Scot, or Switzer, is not a striking example of your theory?”

“I don’t know Wales at all. The Swiss, I believe, use all their *crétins*, as they do their glorious scenery, for show; but, if one may judge by the types we saw about Amat last autumn, I should say your countrymen are highly favoured.”

“Ah! tradition has it that many of those Western Highlanders owe their absence of red hair and high cheek-bones to the remnants of

the Spanish Armada, who found hospitality and domestic felicity with the fair ones of the coasts where they were wrecked in bolting round the North. Did you have any yachting when you were up there?"

"Very little; for, as you may have heard, the Master was knocked overboard the first day we went out and was all but drowned, so that when he left, Lady Amat seemed to dread the idea of any more excursions, and we had to content ourselves mainly with gazing at the distant views, which are quite lovely, are they not?"

"In fine weather. But if you are not so favoured the difference is then even more striking than when the handsome shrew disfigures for her intimates the beauty she wreaths with smiles only for her more favoured, because stranger, visitors."

"I fear you expect too much from Dame Nature," says Eila laughing, as they turn into the picture gallery which is fitted up with a series of tempting retreats for those who are disposed to retire from the crowded rooms.

“Possibly! but if one does not cast the eye upward one is little more than a mole, as the Eastern puts it. Expectation produces hope, and hope by constant nursing sometimes is rewarded with fruition.”

“That probably depends if the object be chosen without vaulting ambition. The humble-minded are often rewarded when they least expect it.”

“Another beatitude! Then I shall try to be of that happy order. Meanwhile, do I infringe the character by asking for further opportunities of improving myself this evening?”

“Certainly not, if you think they will be afforded by waltzing with me. I hate square dances, if my partner bores me.”

“Thanks, a thousand—and for the compliment, which, however, is rather double-edged; but here comes a rival: dangerous because of his youth and consequent boldness. Boys rush in where wise men fear to offer.”

“You were so good as to say I might have one dance, Miss Trevor,” says the graceful lad,

approaching her with that air of timid worship, which, to the beauty sated with bold and common-place admiration, is such a refreshing tribute. "I fear you will not find me a very good hand at waltzing, for my sisters declare they can make nothing of me. But you may be less *exigeante*?"

"I will give you a trial, and a lesson perhaps, Mr. Mostyn, with pleasure, on one condition, that you promise not to bump me."

"I should much prefer to leave myself in your hands in all things," answers the Queen's Page, with a bow he has seen the great Augustus adopt with much success.

"Well then, let us proceed to the school-room. In the mean time, if you like, you can give me an ice while you tell me what sport you have been having with Lord Ongar's."

All too quickly for the enraptured boy do the golden minutes fly while the last good thing on the other side of the county is told in fervent and graphic language to the sympathetic listener. Then comes his turn, and a pause, during which

she says, "Yes, that was very good for a beginner. I fancy sisters are less forbearing or discriminating than the outside world of partners, or you may be a very apt pupil! Your time is excellent; without that no one need hope to dance. Your pace is very fair, but you must learn to increase and modulate it as the Austrian does. And, forgive me if I sound like a 'coach.' I had a brother, dear boy, at Eton too; but he died at the Redan no older than you," she says, *en parenthèse*, with a softened eye which intoxicates her last victim more than ever. "But, don't hold your left arm out as if it were a pump-handle! Now, let us try again, and if this is successful you shall have another after supper."

A welter weight now, and the father of a couple in the Eton eleven, Ralph Mostyn has never forgotten those two dances. Is it well or not that we rarely espouse our first goddess?

Supper is laid out in several rooms; in each a different style. For the real old Tory and his congeners there is the ordinary dining-room,

table, chairs, butler, etc., etc., all *en règle*. The library for the nonce is transformed into a horse-shoe buffet, where the young and impetuous dancers may sustain and refresh their partners and themselves without the peril of losing an item of the programme.

Even Eversleigh's sanctum is invaded, and converted into a miniature club supper-room, where devilled bones, *huitres en surprise*, etc., may be enjoyed with the immediate cigarette and perfect quiet.

But for the long conservatory is reserved the arrangement which charms those most accustomed to continental ways. Stretching along the whole south front of the house, it contains some fifty tables, laid only for two. The palms and other shrubs are grouped in such a way that each happy pair may enjoy a seclusion which the well selected viands and wine-pails leave no prying servant an excuse for interrupting.

It is needless to say that Archie Campbell has not so wasted his opportunity as to neglect such a chance as is given him by his knowledge of

the little surprise which Lady Fan has prepared for her younger guests. And when he asks Clarice if she would like to go to the supper-room she little expects to find herself virtually *tête-à-tête* with one whom, however charming, she instinctively begins to dread.

Too proud though to draw back, and in truth somewhat inquisitive to see who else is there, she suffers herself to go on in this tempting-looking labyrinth; and ere long, forgetful of possible misconstructions by gossip or malice, she abandons herself to the not unpleasant feeling which rest, refreshment, brilliant wit, and admiration, ardent yet discreetly veiled, from a young and handsome man cannot fail to convey, but under exceptional circumstances, to most beautiful daughters of their trusting mother Eve.

Clarice has travelled much, and with an open, cultivated mind. So has Archie, who to a keen perception of the ridiculous adds the invaluable charm of imparting it gracefully.

Amused and interested, it is very natural that Clarice should look so in the eyes of more than

one envious couple as they pass out or in, and draw their own conclusions, and perhaps not extraordinary therefore that the gentle ripple of her laughter should swell into discordant echoes hereafter in very different scenes.

Under such circumstances the hour-glass is apt to stand unreversed; and, as Archie has promised to lead the cotillon, his continued absence from the ball-room becomes alarming to Lady Fan, who sees with chagrin the more distant guests pluming their feathers for the homeward flight, which once begun is so apt to be destructive to the life of such a festivity.

“Colonel Drummond, have you seen Colonel Campbell? I am in despair! It is now nearly three, and the only chance of keeping these early birds,” looking in the direction of some unhappy ones who have twenty miles or more between them and restful couches, “is to start the cotillon at once. I have a great mind to punish him for his absence, and you for your laziness in not trotting out my country girls, by ordering you to take his place.”

“Heaven forbid ! Lady Fanny. The cotillon would be ruined, and I would acquire a fatal reputation for energy ; but I think,” says Montie, with a chuckle which is not thrown away on his perceptive hostess, “I have an idea where to find him. You should not have prepared such a paradise without expecting to hear of some being lost.”

“Go then, quickly ; and, incorrigible as I fear you are, absolution shall reward your capture of the truant ;” and, as she turns to say good-night to some who shudder at the unseemly riot of the dance she is waiting to begin, Lady Fan wonders who is Archie’s last victim.

Meanwhile, straight as the eagle to the stricken fawn, Montie makes for the bower where his keen eyes had seen the pair so well-engrossed some time before.

“Ah ! here you are, at last, Archie ! Lady Fan, the cotillon, and the enraged multitude await your necessary leadership.”

“*Ma foi !* I had clean forgotten it. Won’t you do as well, Montie ?”

“Quite impossible, old fellow. I should tie up everything and everybody, and never be asked here again. Come !” and he vanishes.

“May I then hope for your kind assistance ?” says Archie, as they rise to go, turning to Clarice, who is somewhat startled on looking round to see how deserted every table is.

Again unable to refuse without making more of the situation than she thinks advisable, Clarice puts her hand on his arm, and bows in silent consent.

Well as Charlie knows her, and confident as he may be of her love and loyalty, he would hardly care to hear the asides as the missing, and for the moment all-important, couple appear and assume their duties.

When all is over and they are driving home in the clear full moon which has a hateful threatening in its brightness for those who love a gallop, poor Clarice, wrapped in silence which happily by the others is taken for and respected as sleep, weeps some bitter tears, penitential, as she thinks on the reaction of Charlie and the

laughing words which reached her in the cloak-room.

And so it ever is. Are we not taught to avoid even the appearance of evil? Yet how few of us, judged by others and that standard, would pass shriven!

CHAPTER XVIII.

“Lord, lord, how this world is given to lying.”—*Falstaff*.

WITH a due respect for his keeper's feelings, as well as his pheasants, General Beauchamp never commits the mistake of disturbing his coverts the morning after a ball—when the best men are apt to be but tailers.

Breakfasting at noon, the wearied ones have only to use a simple mechanical contrivance, duly explained to the uninitiated by the careful host, and at his own hour he is called and provided with the *chota hazari*, or little repast, which the General had so appreciated in Indian days, that for such occasions he transplanted it to Champ Royal for the sustenance of those who cannot wait till mid-day.

A few good partridge drives and a dinner earlier than the normal hour of eight attune the nerves of those who have unstrung themselves, and make the evening after a thing of joy instead of frequent weariness.

Six hours of such deep sleep as greets the human owl, the douching-bath, and, not last or least, the freshening cup of tea, bring all to time "as fit as fiddles," so young Mostyn says, when asked what he is up to by the General, who has been up for hours, and, standing on the hearthrug, hails each new comer with an appropriate salutation.

"The hounds meet to-morrow within easy distance, and those who do not care to ride can hunt on wheels," he says, when all are assembled at breakfast. "For this afternoon at one, who says 'No' to a little gunning? On Friday we will shoot 'the sanctum,' when I hope the ladies will favour us at luncheon, but to-day I fear that silence and invisibility are essential in dealing with the wily driven Frenchman."

Six active stable lads on clever "jump horses;"

with a mounted keeper on each flank and centre, armed with what look like pennoned lances, make every drive a rapid and quickly developed series of most sporting shots ; and at four o'clock, when the failing light brings the keenest to confess he cannot see, the ten good guns have bagged a hundred brace.

“ That’s a better way of doing it, Beauchamp,” says Lord Amat, as they walk home, “ than with an army of hulking peasants who seem to grin with pleasure when they see one perishing in a cold nor’-easter, as they slope along with an eye only to beer.”

“ Yes ; I borrowed the idea from the 16th, who used to turn out a troop sometimes, and gradually surround the black buck on the Plains, and then at a fair distance let slip a couple of those huge hairless Rampore greyhounds. It gave us always a gallop, if not venison.”

“ The biggest thing I ever saw in that way with soldiers,” says Montie Drummond, “ was in Bulgaria, when the Second Division was turned out and beat the country for miles in a gradually

converging circle. It didn't produce much of a bag, but they thought it would keep the men's minds off cholera—though in that too they were disappointed, for in their thirst they eat wild grapes and drank bad water, so that their last state was worse than the first."

"They have a crafty way of settling bears in Russia," says Victor Murray, lighting a cigarette. "I was out there last winter for a month or two, and shot a few, but the sport is to spear them. One man I met had come to awful grief through the lancewood shaft snapping at the critical moment; the brute got in upon him then, and clawed his scalp off so effectually that, though they managed to save his life, in their hurry they put it on the wrong way; so that in looking at him you always felt you must be on the wrong side!"

"I have heard they have a way of marking down the bears in the beginning of winter. Is that so, Murray?" asks the General.

"Yes; every village has its so-called 'sportsman' who goes out when the snow falls and

watches, as the bears move for their winter quarters. Coming across a track they follow it up until they know they are pretty near him, and then make a circle. If they do not cross the track again they know he is inside, of course. The next day they visit the place ; if he has gone they follow him, and repeat the operation. If he remains quiet for a day or two they know he has laid up there for the winter.

“Then they go to St. Petersburg and offer the chance of shooting him to the Emperor, or, failing him, some other sporting crack. For that they get fifty or more roubles down, and until the day of the chasse the sportsman keeps watch over the dormant brute ; who is at last roused by the beating villagers, who force him out in the direction of the pointed guns ; but, it’s an odd thing, if he can charge before dropping he always goes for the man who hits him. That’s tame enough work as I found it ; though to wait the rush of a bear on one knee, as if to receive cavalry, thrust the blade of your spear into the horse-shoe mark in his breast as far as the cross-

bar will allow, and then keep him at arm's-length until he drops dead at your feet, is as good a trial for a man's nerves and muscle as I know."

"It would look rather a bore though in the result to look as if your head were screwed on the wrong way," says handsome Archie, who from his habitual coolness in the trenches used to be called 'the Salamander' by his men.

"Better that, perhaps," laughs Montie at his grimace, "than have a leg which don't fit."

"In what case?" asks Lord Amat with some astonishment.

"When I joined the Bombardiers, who had the happiness, you know, of being my first instructors in the art of war, they rejoiced in an excellent messman whom unkind Fates had tied, when perhaps unconscious of the fact, to a lady, one of whose legs was cork! It was attached by a screw. If anything went wrong in taking it off, she used to vent her wrath on her husband by beating him vehemently on the head with it. That might have been wholesome discipline, and therefore to be upheld; but it had unfortunate

consequences apparently, for though they were blessed with eleven children they all came and remained bald as Egyptian vultures."

"Pah! I don't like that story of yours, Montie. It has an unpleasant moral for young bachelors," says the General, as they follow him to the stables to look over their mounts for the morrow. "I can promise you one thing, if you sit tight and handle these fairly they won't put you down or spoil the beauty of yourselves or your children."

"I always envy your nags, Beauchamp," remarks Lord Amat, as they go down the broad alley dividing the twenty ample loose boxes in which they stand unclothed, with coats of satin—the General's favourites, the pictures of horse-flesh in the perfection of condition. "Even Caligula's historical charger could hardly have been better off than these."

"Ah, I like you to say that, old fellow. Ridley here"—says the pleased old soldier, with a jerk of his thumb towards the stud-groom, whose face beams at the encomiums on his cattle

which he hears on every side from the workmanlike critics, as they obey that instinct of cossetting the noble animal which every true horseman delights in — “and I had some differences at first about our ideas, but he has quite come round to mine. I allow no rougher language here than in my drawing-room. If a horse, however good, cannot after a fair trial be brought to a sense of his duty by kindness, he must go. Each has a loose box, big enough for a brood mare and her foal, from which they see each other, and, by daylight, much that goes on outside. As the stable is kept heated by water-pipes they never have any clothing. Water is always by them, hunting or no hunting. Oats, practically, as much as they like, and in addition to hay, of which they get a very limited allowance, I grow a tender kind of gorse, the tops of which are bruised and given them with carrots; the latter only on hunting mornings.”

“Well, if they go as well as they look they’ll be hard to beat,” is the general verdict as a move is made for the house.

Lounging about in the regions devoted to men unattached, and in the enjoyment of the fragrant weed, there is no more pleasant time at Champ Royal than those hours which are often found so dull in less favoured houses.

Thus the General enabled his guests to invigorate their minds, if they chose, as well as their bodies, after the fatigues of the day, before entering on the duties and pleasures of its crowning event.

He was a wise Frenchman who avoided during the day the company of those he was likely to meet in the evening. Possibly related to him of whom it is said that, when M. le Mari had departed to a less injuring world, and he was in due time congratulated on the prospect of settled bliss thus open to him, he objected, "*Mais avec qui passerais-je mes soirées!*" So Archie, with the exception of the morning greeting which on her part had been somewhat embarrassed, has not unskilfully avoided Clarice until they meet in the white drawing-room after dinner.

Too wary to press the advantage he thinks he gained last night, he prefers to seem comparatively indifferent, and bides his time. It is, therefore, late in the evening ere he allows himself the opportunity of saying, "You hunt to-morrow, Miss Beauchamp?" in a tone that piques her, why she cannot tell.

"Oh, yes, Colonel Campbell;" but, strive as she will, the colour comes faintly to her cheek as she speaks. "I always do when the meet is so close; besides, Matching Green is one of our best. While you were out Miss Trevor and I inspected the horses, more especially those which are told off for to-morrow, and I heard that the General is going to mount you on his last favourite, 'Sultan.'"

"That's very good of him. I know he goes like a bullet. What are you going to ride?"

"My pet 'Alma,' which Char—, I mean Captain Grant," correcting herself in some confusion, "brought home from the Crimea. He took a little time to get into the ways of this country; but now he turns at nothing, unless

it be the Roden when it's fuller than I like."

Not caring to pursue a subject which undoubtedly has tender associations, Archie does not regret to see Mrs. Beauchamp giving the signal for an early retirement. Yet, as the detachment files away, Eila is not too much engrossed by her boy to miss an impassioned glance which tells her plainly what the unobserving Clarice has but partly surmised.

CHAPTER XIX.

“The game’s afoot, follow your spirit.”—*King Henry V.*

How anxiously Ralph Mostyn asks, “What’s the morning like, Robert?” Has he not tried on every article of his hunting-kit before going to roost? Poole, Hammond, Bartley, Maxwell—are not they all pressed into the service of equipping him as becometh one of hunting descent, who has put away childish things and is now burning to show his manhood?

“Fine morning, sir,” replies the acting valet, guessing the boy’s feelings as he puts his shaving-water, with a chuckle, on the dressing-table, and makes a pretence of arranging things which were laid out with a loving hand the night before.

"How's the wind?" he asks again, fencing round the question he knows he'll have to put yet straighter ere he gets the answer he longs, yet fears, to hear.

"Easterly, sir," is the exasperating reply, forgiven for the next.

"What! frost?" in a crescendo tone, which penetrates even the heart of the tantalizing flunkey.

"No, sir; I heard Mr. Ridley say that the wind was easterly with a good deal of south in it," at last is wrung from the intelligent domestic, who hears, as he shuts the door :

"By Jove! the very thing," from Ralph, as he springs from bed to the inviting tub, and hastens to grapple with the intricacies of a toilet, than which there is not one more elaborate in a man's whole life, be it for feast, fray, or wedding.

Nature had been in a pleasant mood when the boy was framed, and, as he steps daintily along towards the breakfast-room, more than one pair of bright eyes look admiringly after the handsome lad.

What is there in a red coat, be it of soldier, hunter, or even golfer, that sets the hearts of men, yet more of women, beating quicker than their wont, when the well-loved colour flings its memory-stirring hue across the mental vision ?

Got up as becometh those who look upon a meet as a veritable parade, the General, Lord Amat, Colonel Trevor, the three Guardsmen, and our boy look all over like going, as they congratulate each other on the day, and with one quick glance assure themselves that if they are cut down that day by any one of the others it will be by an acknowledged workman who knows how to put on his war-paint.

No less fitted to ride with or against them do Clarice and Eila seem, when, presently to the delight of all, they descend in the beautiful severity of plain, unbraided habits and tightly-coiled hair.

“ Ah ! it was very nice of you, General,” says Eila, as he takes her by both hands, “ to arrange such a morning as this ; nothing could be better.

I could almost wish the 'meet' was not so near if it were not such a certain find. I am burning to be off. I wish the hunting hours of our grandfathers were kept up, and then in addition to the pleasure of an early start one might always hope to get home without hacking some weary miles in the dark."

"That was all very well for them, Miss Eila, when those who hunted lived in the neighbourhood of the pack they favoured, or for us when we have only a few miles to go; but the men from Colchester or London find a seven o'clock breakfast quite early enough for their modern habits, I fancy."

"Very true, General; one is so apt to be selfish in hunting, you see; though I must thankfully acknowledge that I see very little of it when men so kindly give up their places in a run to help me out of a difficulty."

"Heavens! who would not?" murmurs the worshipping Etonian.

"But," continues Eila, smiling responsively to the boy as she catches the words, "when I

think of it, I feel so ashamed of spoiling their sport that often I shirk a fence rather than run the risk of a catastrophe and the anathemas which I am always half expecting, wholly dreading, to hear burst forth when a lady is down."

"Allow me, Miss Trevor, to be your pilot to-day," breaks in Ralph, unable to restrain himself any longer. "I know every inch of the country. 'The leather-bottle' is a favourite 'meet' of Lord Ongar's staggers; it's big, but honest, and your mare 'Ariel' can fly anything in it; but if you do come to grief," he adds, with a pathos which makes Victor smile, "I'll take care you hear no unpleasant remarks."

"Bravo! my boy," says Colonel Trevor, laying a kindly hand on his shoulder, "we'll look after her together; though sometimes, I can assure you, when we get into that cramped country beyond Dudbrook, I find it as much as I can do to live with her."

"May I hope to do the like for you?" Archie asks, in a low voice, turning to Clarice, who is looking out of the window in a fit of abstraction.

“Oh no, thank you, Colonel Campbell. ‘Alma’ is very safe; besides, I don’t feel as if I should ride much to-day; and it would be a thousand pities if you did not make the most of such a mount as you will have in ‘Sultan.’ He is not very fast, but don’t hustle him at first, and there is not a fence or brook in the country he won’t take you safely over.” So saying, she moves quietly away in a manner that forbids his following her; and Archie bites his lips, feeling that his game is harder than he fancied it was at Knebstowe.

A “meet” at Matching Green is one which no man of that side of Clayshire fails to attend, if he has any love of the sport, or anything on four legs to carry him there or afterwards. Many, too, are those who, rather than see nothing more, come on wheels or foot, and criticise or envy the happy freedom and prospects of the mounted ones.

Thus when the General’s drag, driven by Mrs. Beauchamp’s brother, comes up to the corner, the ladies on it find much to amuse and

interest them in the costumes, demeanour, and appearance of the various votaries of the chase who have preceded them. Shortly after, the perfect turn-out of the mounted party from Champ Royal, who with their second horsemen, make a small troop, adds what a man from the shires might say had hitherto been rather conspicuous from its absence.

Yet they are a good lot, and hard to beat—both men and horses. If the get-up of the former is not always all one looks for from Melton, there is plenty of grit below it, which takes them over places bad to look at, worse to fall into. If the nags show a bit more bone than breeding, remember the country is not light, nor the fences.

Presently some one says, “Here they are!” and trotting round the further side of the Green come Frank Eversleigh and one of the best packs in England. Thanks to careful breeding and drafting, it would be hard to find a more level lot than the two-and-twenty couple which look to Stephen Hobson.

Who remembers what he was then? How

sad is the inevitable deterioration of everything by age !

The perfection of a horseman—light in weight, with a hand, seat, and nerve that few could equal—in disposition as in manner, cheerful and respectful, with a voice of music and an honest soul, he was a servant seldom found, never parted with but by death or folly.

There goes Dick Thoe, a whip who knows his work well and does it better—riding like the devil and falling like an angel, for he never seems to hurt.

He must be a hard man who finds himself able to do more than keep on terms with “the Clays,” when they get the line of a Roothing fox on such a day as this is like to be.

’Midst the up-lifted hats and cheery salutations of the field, the Master gives the needful law for country clocks and urgent correspondence.

“Well, Frank,” says the General, riding up to him ; “we ought to have a run to-day. I am sure I hope so, for I have got some young uns here who are dying for a gallop.”

“No fear, General. If we don’t find in Man Wood—they are cutting faggots there, and be hanged to them—we are sure to do so at Brick-hills; though with the wind as it is we may have only a short spin to Down Hall, which again, you know, is a sure find. I say! Ralph there must look out or he’ll have Victor Murray on his back at the first fence.”

“Trust him for that!” answers the General, laughing as he sees young Mostyn adjusting Eila’s stirrup-leather. “He’ll be better than I take him for if he gets a start of the lad or makes it up afterwards.”

“Well, I must go and say good-morning to Mrs. Beauchamp, give the drag our probable line by the road, and then we’ll move on.”

“Hope you are none the worse for your long drive the other night,” says Eversleigh, lifting his hat to the ladies as he reins in his spanking weight-carrier by the coach.

“Not a bit, thanks! How is Lady Fanny?”

“Miserable, because her ball is over and she has not heard of a single result yet!” he says,

smiling as he thinks of the somewhat exaggerated report of the conservatory suppers which he has, not unwisely, kept back from Milady's ears. "If you are going to stay out you can't do better than keep to the cross-roads about here for a short time. We are sure to go down to Down Hall, I think."

"Hounds! Please, gentlemen!" cries Dick, as the word is given, and he leads the way through the crowd towards the not very distant covert; but, as might have been expected, this morning it is blank for once.

Across a few fields and they are at Brickhills, a biggish wood, and hard to get a fox away from for a time, but a certain find.

Without a discourtesy she will not show to her father's guest and Charlie's cousin, or better reason than she has to offer even to herself, Clarice is fain to accept the *petits soins* which Archie knows so well how to show, unobtrusively, it is true, but still devotedly enough to convey their purport to those who are lookers-on, the proverbial wise ones in every game.

“I think, Miss Beauchamp, with the wind as it is he is bound to break at that corner ; shall we stay by it ?”

“If you please,” she answers, with a formal bow, vowing that if he does she will make the pace as hot as she can for one in whom she begins now to recognize an unwelcome rival of her absent one. Then, feeling that she is ungenerous, she adds with a softening look, “Should he go for Down Hall, along the bottoms, there is a very ugly double ditch and bank on this side of Matching Pond ; let ‘Sultan’ have his head at it, or you may spoil your coat.”

“Thanks ! That’s a fox !” whispers Archie a few minutes later, as a hound gives tongue in the note so unmistakably different from riot.

“Keep still !” answers Clarice in a low tone, drawing her reins quietly through her fingers. “I saw him cross the ride up there just now. What a splendid fellow he is ! He is working for the corner, as you said.”

Five minutes more suspense, and the hounds

making it too hot for him, he breaks covert and is viewed away.

“Tally-ho! Gone away! For’ard away! away! away!” A few quick notes of the horn, and the hounds crashing through the fence are on good terms with him for some minutes before many of those on the other side of the wood know that they are gone.

As Dick flies down one of the rides, going at a pace that tells Ralph what is up, he gives one or two of his yells which very soon bring most of the field to the knowledge that they have little time to spare and much to make up.

Eila and her squires are not long in following Clarice—keeping her place in the first flight—which ‘Alma’s’ turn of speed and powers of jumping give little reason to doubt will be maintained, barring accidents.

As they settle down, and jump into and out of the Moreton Lane, the drag party have a splendid view of the hunt sweeping across the meadows towards Matching Park.

“Brava!” cries Sir Philip, as he sees his niece

take a gate in splendid form. "I had no idea that 'Alma' could do timber like that. Bless the girl! She's riding jealous! Did you see how she turned to look if Campbell took it? There's no fear of 'Sultan' if his rider means business."

"Ah, well; let us turn too, Phil, and go by the Green to the Park; there may be a check there, and we shall see them again," says Mrs. Beauchamp, as she looks wistfully after her only child. "Her father is with her, but I hope she won't be very rash, though on 'Alma' she turns from nothing."

"Don't be nervous, Eva," kindly says her brother, who, unselfish as ever, has insisted on giving up his own sport to work the coach, but is inwardly eating his heart out as he sees the men go by. "She and the old horse know each other pretty well by this time."

Meanwhile the fox does not let the grass grow below his feet as he makes for his point; but, just as he is entering Matching, Park he is

headed by a ploughman, and taking, as the sailors say, a fresh departure, alters his course as if for the friendly haunts of Barnsley. Turning, however, short of Thesher's Bush, his line is now by Magdalen Laver, and so on nearly to 'The Talbot' at North Weald, making as if for the safety surely found at Ongar Park ; but, swinging again to the left along the grassy bottoms, the untiring fox passes Blake Hall, goes up the hill and down to Shelley Ford, where comes at last a welcome check.

"Is this 'the flying Dutchman'?" asks Archie, as they gladly pull up for a minute. "The field is getting rapidly select," looking round and behind him. "There's Frank Eversleigh, Hobson and Dick of course ; Miss Trevor, and equally, of course, her satellites, the boy and Victor Murray, with her father coming on ; but I see nothing of the General or Drummond."

"The pace has been too good for many perhaps," says Clarice, patting 'Alma's' crest affectionately, with but little breath to spare for

conversation. "I am glad Eila is in it, for it will be quite the run of the season if he goes on much longer."

But a cast across the brook, and up the hill they go again towards Forest Hall, as if lungs and legs have been renewed.

"That check was much too short, Miss Trevor," says Victor Murray, as they take a ditch and bank into a meadow, and shove along with somewhat bated strength. "I didn't think they did this sort of a thing in a plough country. It's like a run in a book."

"Only this has the advantage of reality," grins Ralph, as he sails easily along on the other side. "We have come a goodish round already, and I see nothing now for him but Norwood, which is not far from where we found."

"So it is," cries Eila, "for there is Fyfield," pointing to the right with her whip, and the next instant nearly paying the penalty for taking her eyes off her tired mare, when she all but comes down in a water-furrow.

But the pace and distance are beginning to tell, and more than she would be glad of a second horse ; though, of course, not one of the dozen that are out is within miles of them. Still, beyond an occasional blunder neatly saved, nothing has happened worthy of note to those in the first flight, and as they follow on it seems, to those behind, as if it were going to last all day.

At last there comes a yawner—a big and deepish ditch—a bank beyond topped by a live-bound fence.

“ Hold hard, Miss Beauchamp, until I break a hole,” yells Archie, cramming at it, but feeling rather doubtful.

For answer Clarice, shooting past him, is at it in a moment. But poor old ‘Alma,’ somewhat pressed, and hustled out of time and stride by her unwonted loss of temper, jumps a little short, hangs on the top, while Archie reining in can only wait events ; and then at last, as if all conscious of their impending fate, the

horse falls heavily, crashing back on his fair mistress.

The catastrophe being inevitable, Clarice swings herself out of the saddle just in time, and would save herself but for the fatal habit, which catching drags her down below the horse, who now lies full length along the ditch, her dainty head between his heels.

In an instant Archie is beside her, but at a glance he sees nothing can save her if the horse moves but a hoof.

“Keep quiet, for God’s sake, darling,” implores Archie in his agony of mind. “Speak to ‘Alma’; he will recognize your voice, and a hunter often knows when struggles are useless. As soon as some one comes I’ll send for men and spades; but until then your very life depends upon your calmness.”

“I know,” she faintly answers, as she shudderingly recognizes how helpless she is. “‘Alma’ won’t move. It’s not the first time we have been down together. But do try and get his

weight off my chest. I feel as if I cannot lie under it."

"Take some of this," says the horror-stricken Archie, holding his flask to her lips, "and try to keep up for a few minutes. There must be some one here immediately ;" but his heart goes down to his boots as he sees her getting paler and evidently faint, lying really in the very jaws of death.

In happy ignorance of the accident, Frank Eversleigh, followed by Eila and her cavaliers, whose line lay more to the right, presses on unheedingly, so that it is an apparent eternity of agony ere, at the expiration of really only a few minutes, some of the foremost of the hunt jumping off their horses are giving the contradictory advice and opinions so lavishly and kindly at one's service on such occasions.

Still lies 'Alma' as the dead, though his open, intelligent eye and distending nostril show the anxious lookers-on that he is quite alive, and at any moment in his efforts to release himself

may crush the life out of his unfortunate rider, in whom they recognize with grief the fair Diana of "the Clays."

"Unless his back be broke," mutters old Hare, one of the best of the many good and sporting yeomen of the district, "he's sure to do some harm to Miss Beauchamp. How can he help it, poor brute? Go," he adds in a whisper, "to Mumford's over there," pointing to a farm not far off, "and bring a loaded gun. It's the only chance for her, unless he's powerless behind."

Another gallops for men, spades, ropes, and drawing-tackle from a neighbouring brick-field.

Meanwhile poor Clarice, nearly crushed to death, has obeyed the most sensible of the many directions given; and, thanks to the inequality and softness of the ground in the bottom of the ditch and the slight protection afforded by the crutch of the saddle, has inch by inch moved herself into a more supportable position, but still her head is most perilously near the iron hoofs which gleam on either side of it.

“What are you going to do with that gun?” she faintly asks, as incautiously it is brought past her.

“Please, Miss, we maun shute him. If his back be broke he maun die, an if he doant hoo caun we pul ye oot!”

“Oh, give him a chance, poor horse!” she pleads. “I love him so. Stay! don’t! For my sake, don’t! I will gladly run the chance of harm rather than he should suffer certain death.”

“Oh, Charlie!” she says to herself, while they hesitate and murmur at the awful risk, “I cannot let them destroy what you have given me.”

“See,” she presently says, as an idea strikes her, “if there is not a piece of sugar in the pocket of the saddle, and give it to him when I speak.”

With trembling fingers and quaking heart Archie carries out the happy thought; and, as the faithful ‘Alma’ takes the proffered lump,

Clarice says, "Be quiet, old man!—quiet, quiet, 'Alma,' for your master's sake and mine."

Hardly does the sagacious brute seem to dare to crunch the accustomed dainty as he pricks his ears and listens to the caressing tone he knows so well.

So, summoning up courage for the task, four stalwart yeomen, with such gentle tenderness as those true-hearted men do ever show, inch by inch draw forth the half-numbed Clarice, while Archie shivers with almost deathly fear as he strokes the intelligent horse's head and prays, as he has not done since first he left his mother's leading-strings.

"My God! I thank thee," is his fervent offering, as the increasing throng with one loud shout proclaim her safety.

Pale indeed, drenched through and stiff, her clothes besmirched, her hair dishevelled, Clarice never looked more lovely in his eyes than as she comes to 'Alma's' head, supported by kind old Hare, and kneeling down beside the horse,

who looks as if he knows the crisis is now passed, kisses many times his chesnut muzzle, and then, most womanly, dissolves herself in tears.

Half-a-dozen willing hands and spades soon give him freedom for his limbs, and with a snort or two and some such struggles as tell them what might have been her fate, he is standing on the bank with trembling limbs beside the mistress he has saved, if nearly killed.

Mounting presently, and trotting along the road, they meet the anxious General, who, himself thrown out, is riding back to inquire what had become of her.

“ You have had an ugly fall, I fear, my girl ? ” he asks anxiously, seeing how she and ‘ Alma ’ are bemired. “ You aren’t hurt ? ”

“ No, dear father, not a bit ; only a little shaken. It was all my fault. I went too fast at a biggish place, and he hardly cleared it ; but we are all right, really,” she adds with a brave smile to re-assure him, though she feels as if the

ponderous weight were still across her, and that warmth and rest would be worth a ransom at the moment.

“That’s well, my pet ; but I think we had better take you home at once, for you are looking very tired, and after such a run they’ll surely draw towards the kennels.”

“Have you seen Eila ?” asks Clarice, as they jog along.

“Yes ; she, Victor Murray, and Ralph were up with Eversleigh as they ran to earth at Norwood. Two hours and forty minutes, they tell me.”

“Ah, here they are,” says the General, as Eila and the others, trotting sharply round the corner, come in quest of Clarice with much anxiety, for the rumour which had reached them did not fail to exaggerate the accident.

“Oh, my dearest, I am so relieved to find you on old ‘Alma’ ; I heard such terrible things of your fall. The mildest was that in the end you had both been shot,” says Eila, rather wildly and hysterically. “But you are sure

you are not hurt? — you look most awfully done up.”

“No wonder, Miss Trevor; I can’t say how long she lay in the ditch under that old gentleman, who seemed to take it all in, and hardly moved a muscle until she was safe. He’s worth his weight in any metal,” says Archie, who breaks silence for the first time since he lifted Clarice back into her saddle.

As he speaks it flashes across her what she owes to both, and stretching out her hand to him, she says, impulsively, “I cannot thank you more than him just now,” but her eyes are grateful, and he is well content.

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